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**ANNETTE MESSENGER'S *PENETRATION*:
FROM HAVING A BODY TO BEING A BODY**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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RÉSUMÉ

La référence au corps chez Annette Messenger est récurrente et quasi obsessionnelle. Toutefois, pour la première fois, avec *Pénétration* (1993-1994) l'artiste explore l'intérieur du corps.

Anatomiquement descriptif et singulièrement symboliques, les éléments de cette composition suspendue forment un portrait démesuré des éléments dont nous sommes constitués. Avec cette thèse, je démontrerai que ce qui est exhibé c'est l'envers du corps : ses dessous, son contenu, ses secrets, ce qui se trouve de l'autre côté de la frontière corporelle et qui imprègne la chair.

De plus, bien que la composition suggère un modèle anatomique tridimensionnel, je montrerai qu'il s'agit d'une expérience distinctement visuelle et cérébrale : une conceptualisation du corps plutôt qu'un corps. *Pénétration* représente une vision de nous que nous ne connaissons pas de façon réellement familière mais plutôt qui nous provient des diagrammes visuels tirés de la recherche et du consensus scientifiques puisque ses éléments découpés et les couleurs utilisées sont issues des illustrations médicales.

En utilisant des exemples artistiques et historiques, j'établirai que bien que le corps humain proposé par Messenger soit basé sur le modèle anatomique, la représentation n'est pas une mise à plat ou une réduction du corps à une énumération érudite, mais plutôt un modèle tridimensionnel qui peut être expérimenté de l'intérieur.

Messenger met en scène la possibilité d'un corps à corps avec le spectateur. À l'intérieur de *Pénétration* le corps nous rappelle la matérialité du corps, un corps où des organes internes « morts » pendent et « reprennent » vie via la participation des spectateurs, via leur pénétration. Les rapports d'échelle sont bouleversés et les spectateurs sont invités à pénétrer le corps : à voir les choses de plus près, à les sentir, à les frôler.

Avec *Pénétration* Messenger confronte les spectateurs à un acte intime puisqu'elle les dirige sous (ou plutôt) dans la peau de quelqu'un et les oblige à mesurer leur propre sens d'incarnation. Messenger honore le corps physique comme notre mode premier d'appréhender le monde. J'établirai qu'avec son traitement spécifique du corps et sans devoir compter sur la technologie moderne, l'artiste offre une étude sur le corps ainsi que se questionne sur les notions d'incarnation. Autrement dit, je démontrerai que *Pénétration* célèbre un jeu complexe de négociations entre le corps et l'espace : négociations entre le domaine réel du corps du spectateur et le domaine (virtuel) tridimensionnel du corps représenté et des espaces représentés.

Pour conclure, je proposerai que via le sens du toucher Annette Messenger produit un corps où il n'y a aucun échappatoire entre la vision objective et le sentiment subjectif et où l'expérience humaine se forme et se transforme.

ABSTRACT

The reference to the body is a recurring and almost obsessive theme in Annette Messenger's work. However, for the first time with *Penetration* (1993-1994) the artist investigates the inside of the body.

Anatomically descriptive and strangely symbolical the components of this hanging composition make up a huge portrait of the elements with which we are composed. With this thesis, I will demonstrate what is revealed is the body's structure: its content, its secrets, what is on the other side of the physical border and what soaks the flesh, the forces that bring us alive.

In addition, although the composition suggests a three-dimensional anatomical model, I will reveal it remains a distinctly visual and cerebral experience: a conceptualization of the body rather than the body's itself. *Penetration* stands for a view of ourselves that we know not from any real familiarity but from visual diagrams that have been derived from scientific research and consensus since, its separate elements and colors are taken from medical illustration.

Using artistic and historic examples, I will establish that even though the human body proposed by Messenger is based on the anatomical model it is not a flattened representation reduced to an erudite enumeration but rather a three-dimensional model which can be experienced from within.

Messenger stages the possibility of a face-to-face with the spectator. Inside *Penetration* the body recalls the very body materiality, a body where "dead" dangling internal organs "come to life" via the viewers' participation, via their penetration. The relationship of scale is upset and the spectators are invited to penetrate inside the body: to see things from up-close, to feel its elements, to touch its parts.

With *Penetration* Messenger confronts the spectators with an intimate act as she directs them under (or rather) inside somebody's skin and forces them to confront their own sense of embodiment. Messenger honours the physical body as our primary means of experiencing the world. I will ascertain that with her specific treatment of the body and without having to rely on modern technology, the artist offers an inquiry into the body as well as questions notions of embodiment. In other words, I will demonstrate *Penetration* exemplifies a complex set of negotiations between body and space: negotiations between the actual domain of the real body of the viewer and the three-dimensional (virtual) domain of the represented body and represented spaces.

In conclusion, I will propose that via the sense of touch Annette Messenger produces a body where there is no escape between objective seeing and subjective feeling and where the human experience is formed and transformed.

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INTRODUCTION

With *Penetration* (1993-1994) (Fig.1-7) Annette Messenger creates a new way of viewing, thinking and experiencing the human body. Messenger's non-inclusion of painting and photography - techniques which she used in her earlier years - and her use of forms inspired by ethnological collections, popular culture and typical medical tradition as well as her recourse to Installation Art as a supplement to pictorial gesture, anchor *Penetration* in one of the problematics of our time: what is a body today?

In this thesis, my intention is to demonstrate how via *Penetration* Messenger examines the body in a deeper and more profound way and advances the representation of the body from surface to depth, from bi-dimensionality to tri-dimensionality, and from horizontality to verticality both from her own work's perspective and from an art historical standpoint. I will interpret how *Penetration* represents a progress narrative in Messenger's way of depicting the body as she subjects the body and its biological processes to scrutiny. Inside Messenger's oeuvre, the installation piece holds a privileged position. Where she had previously represented the outside and surface of the body - i.e. the skin and limbs of the human body - via painting, drawing and photography, with *Penetration* Messenger goes inside and represents the body's core: the viscera. In addition, where she had previously depicted the body in a bi-dimensional way, with *Penetration* Messenger expands her representation to a three-dimensional construction: as a result of bringing together traditional anatomical imagery, Installation Art and the viewer's

participation. Finally, in earlier works, Messenger's constructions were linear - usually represented inside manuscripts or mounted onto exhibition walls as components of series. *Penetration* is suspended from the ceiling and stretches vertically like never before. The organs are displayed and offered for consumption - like meat - to the viewer. Within an art historical perspective, *Penetration* occupies a significant position which will be discussed in "From Medical Vision to Viewer Participation" (Chapter 2). In previous Western Art the power of the image of the nude - the expressivity of the flesh - inspired artists. From the beginning of history, an appreciation of the human form was essential for artists to express themselves with the figure: anatomy served to make the figure. I will demonstrate that with *Penetration* anatomy makes the body. I will establish how Messenger uses anatomy as her subject as well as the object of the work. In addition, I will determine how Messenger fragments the human body in order to produce a new type of body and questions the body's boundaries and definition. Through structural and material juxtapositions that are sensuously tactile, Messenger creates a hybridisation and a physicality which had been absent before hand. Furthermore, I will articulate how with *Penetration*, Messenger brings the anatomical body into being in a three-dimensional arrangement where each organ can be sensed individually. Although three-dimensional anatomical models had been executed as early as the eighteenth century - and possibly earlier - Messenger brings a new dimension to the understanding of the human body that has been missing throughout anatomical history. Messenger's body is fragmented yet penetrable and sensorial.

In other words, with this thesis my purpose is to demonstrate how Messenger produces a unique type of body and why this specific comprehension and interpretation of the body is one which needs to be considered.

1) The Body chez Annette Messenger

French artist Annette Messenger, born in Berck-sur-Mer in 1943, studied traditional fine art at the *École nationale des arts décoratifs* in Paris between 1962 and 1966. Messenger started making art at the end of the 1960s and exhibiting it as early as 1973¹. Messenger has had numerous individual exhibitions in France, Europe and North America² in addition to being included in many major group exhibitions over the past decades.³ Internationally acclaimed, she is recognized as being at the forefront of contemporary art. In her monograph about the artist, art critic Catherine Grenier places Annette Messenger among Europe's leading contemporary artists as a result of her original use of form and poetic power of communication. For Grenier, Messenger's art is "readily understandable,

¹1973 is the date of Annette Messenger's first one person exhibition at the Städtische Galerie in Lenbachhaus.

² (...) 1984, "Annette Messenger - les pièges à Chimères," ARC-Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, (...) 1991 "Annette Messenger - Making Up Stories / Faire des Histoires," Mercer Union, Center for Contemporary Art [and] Cold City Gallery, Toronto (...) 1995, "Faire Parade," ARC-Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (...) 1999 "En Balance," Museo d'Arte Moderna, Buenos Aires (...)

³ (...) 1977, "Bookworks," The Museum of Modern Art New York (...) 1983, "New Art 83," Tate Gallery, London (...) 1989, "Les 100 jours d'art contemporain de Montréal," Centre International d'Art Contemporain, Montréal (...) 1995, "Masculin-Féminin -Le Sexe de l'Art," Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (...) 1997, "Floating Images of Women in Art History," Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Tochigi, Japan (...) 2000, "Closer to One Another," Havana Biennale (...)

familiar yet precious and underpinned by timeless tradition, her pieces have the universally acknowledged attractions of openness and disinterestedness.”⁴

Annette Messenger’s mixing of autobiography and history, of historically conventional art and ordinary practical activities - such as embroidery, collages, scrap books, arrangements, etc. - of skilled renderings and crude imagery can be interpreted as the artist’s criticism of the traditional artistic practices of her time.

Since the beginning of her career, Messenger has been fascinated with the human form, placing her own body as well as that of others at the center of her compositions. Starting in the 1980s the artist used photography in her approach to the theme of corporeality. The majority of her works included a signature motif: small black-and-white pictures of body parts framed under glass. Each composition that featured the signature motif was made of either an individual frame or an arrangement of individual frames. What is significant during this time is that Messenger’s practice related to a specific methodology: she framed close-ups of various body parts, classified, arranged and composed “entities” in order to represent hybrid bodies. Although the arrangements did not have the form of a “normal” complete integral body, the viewer unmistakably recognized them as bodies due to the self-evident framing of the multiple body parts. In addition, at that time, Messenger’s arrangements manifested themselves in the form of temporary configurations - since the same work could take on different shapes in different exhibitions - either hung, webbed or pinned across the gallery walls.

⁴ Catherine Grenier, *Annette Messenger* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000, English language edition, 2001), 43.

In a group of works titled *My Trophies* (Mes Trophées, 1986-1987) (Fig.8-10) the photographs are marked by drawings. Made of isolated parts of the human body immeasurably blown up or dramatically shrunk - a finger, a foot, a mouth - drawn over with anecdotes, symbols and decorative marks. Each work of this series is dominated by a way of looking designed to surprise the viewer. The smooth skin of the classic body has been transformed into a vivid landscape and the parts, liberated from their original meaning, are transformed into other things through the covering up or the enhancement of their own characteristics. In *My Works* (Mes Ouvrages, 1987) (Fig.11-17) Messenger links words written in color pencil on the wall with photographs of body parts. The small words and small images are interconnected in the overall web-like pattern - a maze or a map - which allows the viewer to move around from one image to another by way of words describing ideas or emotional states - from fear, to protection, and then to hesitation for instance. With this series Messenger forces the viewer to approach the composition and to travel into a constant flux between multiple states. In *My Vows* or *My Wishes* (according to the translation) (Mes Voeux, 1988-1991) (Fig.18-19) strings suspend photographs of body parts that overlap one another and which are presented in clusters. Each composition creates large geometric forms on the wall where the body reconstituted is one which is deliberately confused, incoherent and strongly surreal. As early as the 1980s Messenger's focus on the body and its functions started illustrating her defiance of the traditional distinction between public and private subject matter. Her visual method of splitting up faces and bodies - where each photographic fragment attempted a re-construction in which each carnal detail became a clue and revealed unsuspected insights into the understanding of the human body - was pursued in the

1990s. Where the human body had generally been presented in art - when it was shown fragmented - as dismembered into major body parts: torso, limbs, etc. with arrangements like *My Vows* and *My Works* (for instance) Messenger's focus leaned toward the body's extremities: nipples, ears etc. In these earlier works the concern with the body and the skin surfaced. With *Penetration*, the focal point became placed on the insides: the organs.

As photography by Messenger had been explored initially to re-frame and re-present the body in new contexts and as it had become the medium through which a new aesthetics of the human body as re-shaped and re-structured was created, with *Penetration* anatomy will be employed to re-think the human form. I will demonstrate how, in the early 1990s, the anatomical reference becomes evident in several of Messenger's depictions. Her titles as well as her compositions refer openly to the artistic and scientific methods of representing, organizing and labelling the human body that can be found in medical illustrations and representations. This point will be elaborated on in "From Medical Vision to Viewer Participation" (Chapter 2). Additionally, I will explain how from *Penetration* onwards, when dealing with the human form, Messenger will concentrate on the physical configuration of the body in such a way that her representations will stem from and replicate anatomical illustrations and will become represented in three-dimensions.

2) Description and Presentation of *Penetration*

a) Visual Description

Penetration is a single installation piece embracing the entire exhibition space. Initially set in the artist's studio it was first exhibited in the Monika Sprüth Gallery, Cologne, where the composition was modified to suit the dimension of the gallery space⁵. In April 1996, the work was purchased by the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Since its acquisition *Penetration* has traveled throughout the world and has been shown in various Museums and World Fairs. Like the majority of Messenger's art, *Penetration* is a work that has transformed over time. Messenger adapts the arrangement to the size of the room it is presented in and the number of organs varies - between 50 and 101 elements - according to the space it is shown in and the artist's preference. With *Penetration* the abundance of detail provokes a visual impact which runs the full length of the gallery space.

Hanging from soft-pink angora yarns in a dense grouping, a variety of elements create a three-dimensional anatomical model. The piece is an assemblage of soft, handmade stuffed forms in bright colors that resemble and refer to the body's internal organs and systems. In the installation guidelines specified to the National gallery of Australia upon their purchase of the work, Messenger stipulates that *Penetration* is to occupy the totality

⁵ *Penetration* was first created in 1993-1994 and presented in Cologne in 1994-1995.

of the exhibition area and it is to be “preferably presented in a closed and dark room, with two entrances, which are diagonally opposite.”⁶

The hanging mechanisms or ties for the stuffed shapes are made from nylon fishing line and angora wool which have been twisted together and glued, with the wool covering the nylon. Each shape hangs from the wires, as straight as possible, by a slip knot in order to prevent the ties from tangling and knotting to occur. Hanging by their strings, the fragments seem arrested in their fall and abandoned in suspension. Each internal body part is suspended at different distances from the ceiling (distance which is determined by the length of the ties), every piece floats above ground near eye level and their combination creates an accumulation of forms. Inside the composition, the colors of the shapes are varied in such a way that no two identical or similar looking organs are hung side-by-side. In addition, the sizes of the organs are varied. Moving in and around the composition, the visitor makes out various lungs, kidneys, the heart, the spine, the nervous system, a womb, ovaries and even a foetus in several (three) stages of its growth.

Penetration has a diagrammatic quality - diagrammatic in the sense that it demonstrates the form or workings of the body - and represents a conceptual body. I believe the body produced is conceptual because the installation provides a compelling visual extravagance that does not connect with the reality of the body's internal functions since the placement of the organs is not compliant to biological accuracy. Inside the composition, casually coloured organs hang in dense clusters and the shapes are repeated

⁶ The following is an excerpt of the notes taken by Micheline Ford (in collaboration with Annette Messenger) during the installation of *Penetration* for the *Islands: Contemporary Installations* exhibition, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 31 August - 27 October, 1996.

and placed in a random way, much like the isolated body parts that had been photographed during Messenger's earlier series. With *Penetration*, the body is represented in a playful mode - the arrangement is colourful and soft to the touch - while it still displays everyone's internal fears: the body represented evoking life only to point out its absence (absence: since the organs have been taken away from their life force and because it is a representation.)

Inside *Penetration* the integral factual body has disappeared. However, Messenger's loosely interpreted body organs do remind us of our own bodies even if not quite accurately. The work remains a distinctly visual and cerebral experience: a conceptualization of the body rather than the body itself, a view of ourselves that we know not from any real familiarity but from visual diagrams that have been derived from scientific research and consensus. Incomplete, formed out of materials, and perceived as inadequate by the viewer, the whole ensemble is given the sense of a concept rather than a palpable object complete in itself because of its positioning as well as its materiality. Because offering everything for display or show, representing the un-representable - the open body - means the production of an image that displaces the boundaries of space (inside/outside of the body) and the limits of time rather than the body itself, the work is a theorization of the body. However, what is significant with *Penetration* is that although the body represented is fragmented the viewer who engages with the work relates to the body organs as if they represented a unified whole: a cohesive body. This point will be thoroughly discussed in "From Medical Vision to Viewer Participation" (Chapter 2). In spite of that, the corpus of the object also constitutes an idea of wholeness rather than its

reality, a frame of reference that the dangling viscera serve to undermine by the breaking of the frame itself. With this thesis, I will determine that Messenger views our broken bodies as the mirror of a highly fragmented society that separates male from female, mind from body, and body from spirit. Because the fragmentation of bodies, functions and activities denote the artist's compulsive desire to see and to know - one which she exchanges and shares with the spectators - I will demonstrate the installation is an obsessive attempt to heal or mend these deep divides.

As an assemblage of brightly sewn shapes and stuffed coloured fabric that resemble internal organs and create a three-dimensional anatomical model, *Penetration* produces an optical charm where the combination of the individual motifs symbolizes curious reflections on physicality and transformation. The strength of Messenger's approach resides in its directness and honesty. Revelation comes from seeing the body so closely magnified. Revelation which simultaneously, attracts and repels the viewer who finds himself or herself confronted with raw physical facts.

Far from being macabre, the separate elements and the colors used by the artist suggest medical illustrations as instituted in and by the contemporary Western culture. Since 1858, Doctor Henry Gray's *Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical of the Human Body*⁷ (Fig. 20-21) has served to legitimize notions of "serious" science unchallenged by the frivolity of art and has set the standard for medical images. Gray's *Anatomy* is one of those few titles that nearly everyone has heard of: it is a "classic" book on anatomy where the drawings are accurate and stylish. The book's main effort is to explain human

⁷ Henry Gray, *Anatomy, Surgical and Descriptive of the Human Body*. (Philadelphia: Lea Febiger, 1918).

anatomy, however, it does it with images as well as words. The drawings support the text's explanations and vice versa. Not just a dry index of parts and names, Gray's *Anatomy* lets the natural charm and style of the body's interconnected systems and structures shine forth from the page. Using impressive illustrations and clear, matter-of-fact descriptions, Doctor Gray produced a classic. This all-inclusive reference to the human form and analytical work on the anatomy of the human figure set the contemporary anatomical standard since it has provided information in a simple, timeless format that cleanly dissected a body of knowledge grown over centuries. I will demonstrate that with *Penetration*, Messenger has clearly been influenced by the anatomical vocabulary first developed by Henry Gray and later pursued by his followers.

b) Sensorial Description

Anatomically descriptive, strangely symbolical, the components of this hanging composition make up a huge portrait - the organs are larger than life and the relations of scale are reversed - of the elements with which we are composed: the forces that bring us alive. In fact, I will demonstrate that at their most primitive level, the accumulation of forms represents fecundity or the life force and that it is the visitor who brings the solitary and independent parts together: who completes the body. In addition, I will explain how the presence of the foetus may allude to fecundity.

Since the word "penetration" also relates, by definition⁸, to sexuality can a correlation between the viewer's "sexual" penetration and the idea of productivity be made? The

⁸ "Penetration: the insertion of the penis into the vagina or anus". Encarta, World English Dictionary Online (North America Edition: Microsoft Corporation , 2001).

“objects” are hung close together without touching. In entering or “penetrating” the installation and circulating within it - like blood or semen in the human body - the viewer connects the individual parts and brings the work - body - to life. The body (of the spectator/actor) becomes the force that puts the installation into motion. Invited to enter this new world, the viewers can experience (see and feel) it in an imaginative and compelling way and their body becomes an essential component of the formal, conceptual and functional configuration.

Penetration is Messenger’s first walk-through piece with hanging elements. The space suggested is different from anything the artist had previously done. In comparison to earlier works the representation of the body has gained in volume. The body is now three-dimensional and has expanded in space. The viewers have the power to penetrate the work with their whole body. In definition, “penetration” also refers to the action of entering or passing through as well as the ability or power to penetrate. Walking into, through and around this environment - where the size and scale had been envisioned this way before - one discovers that Annette Messenger has demonstrated an acute feel for compositional strategies where the overall shapes make the whole seem conceptually definite. The work stands ready to interact with all the visitors who choose to enter, cross through it and wander in it. From *Penetration* onwards, the total invasion of space will become the guiding principle behind the entire exhibitions. Exhibitions that will be imagined as large scale single “penetrables.” By penetrable I refer to Brazilian artist Jesús Rafael Soto’s 1962 work (Fig. 22-23) which will be carefully examined in “From

Medical Vision to Viewer Participation” (Chapter 1) and in “*Penetration* and the History of Spectatorship in Visual Art” (Chapter 3).

By experiencing her sculpture, by placing one’s body in relationship to it, the viewer is made aware of his or her own internal space and is thus able to enter into a body. In this work, which more than any other prior work envelops and incorporates the viewer’s own body, Messenger aims to create an oppressive atmosphere while simultaneously communicating a feeling of freedom. The repetition and obsession of parts expresses a desire for intimacy countered by feelings of aggression. In supporting a kind of exhibitionism - by showing what is usually hidden - Messenger uses an additional approach to stimulate the viewer. As such, *Penetration* gives the viewer a thrilling, magical and theatrical experience.

This mysterious feel is also given by Messenger’s use of light. Inside *Penetration*, the lighting is important. Alongside the body parts, bare light bulbs - usually 3 to 7 - hang, from long electrical cords, at a slightly lower level and closer to the ground (at about one meter from the ground) inside the composition. Although centre stage the lighting is dim. For *Islands: Contemporary Installations from Australia, Asia, Europe and America*⁹ exhibit the artist had originally requested 7 lights, but the room was too bright and the shadows created were not dark enough so there number was cut back to 3. Nevertheless, presented in this manner, the bulbs illuminate the installation from its inside and give the composition an overall shadowy and kinetic feeling. This develops in two ways: because

⁹ *Islands: Contemporary Installations from Australia, Asia, Europe and America*. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 31 August - 27 October ,1996.

these lights are directed onto the figurative shapes, they help delineate each part from the other; while also creating a mysterious environment of silhouettes in movement. Yet, transformation occurs at different levels. Due to the special lighting that was carefully considered, “frightening” shadows are deliberately created - in particular around the foetuses - that contrast with the vibrant colours of the organs and their almost whimsical shapes. Therefore, the objects - organs - that seem to be “dancing” around the viewer who walks among them also assume grotesque shapes on the bare walls. The shadows seem both magical, because they dance, and sinister, because we come to realize that what is represented onto the bare walls are both, the grotesque shapes (in negative) of the organs and the viewers’/participants’ bodies. Consequently, entering Annette Messenger’s *Penetration* is like experiencing a floating “forest,”¹⁰ a labyrinth or chancing upon a shower of internal human body parts hanging in mid-air and suspended on display. Far from being macabre since the separate elements and colours suggest medical illustrations, the work takes on a playful impression.

Although the light bulbs are small and their intensity is low, the lights release bright direct lighting in addition to heat. The varying degrees of heat emitted from the bulbs along with the large size of the work merge the visual experience with a physical one. Apparently, because the light bulbs were set one meter from the ground and the public

¹⁰ Excerpt from Nachtergaele Magali, « Annette ton univers impitoyable », *Numéro des lecteurs des Inrockuptibles* [online], 22 décembre 1999.

Magali Nachtergaele: « Vous dessinez, fabriquez des organes, qu’est-ce qui vous plaît? ».

Annette Messenger : « Oh, c’est comme dessiner une forêt... ce qui est bien, c’est que ça, on l’a tous, et c’est quand même dégueulasse tout ce qu’on a à l’intérieur! Les intestins que j’ai fait je voulais qu’ils ressemblent à des coussins, à des poupées. Les organes suspendus c’était la maternité, un fœtus qui ressemblait à une poupée. Il faut garder une distance, ça reste de l’ordre de l’imaginaire. Ce qui m’intéresse c’est un fantastique qui est là, en nous, pas le fantastique lointain, ce qui m’intéresse, c’est nous-même ».

could touch them, it became a safety issue, and the voltage was taken down with various transformers and low watt bulbs were used.¹¹ The relationship of light and heat to the body will be discussed in “Touching the Parts” (Chapter 4).

With *Penetration*, the art has been removed from the walls. However, the walls of the gallery participate in the installation’s entirety since they frame the work. For example, in the Monika Sprüth Gallery installation, the composition was made to fit the space and Messenger used the pre-existing settings to establish her creation. Although the limits were predetermined the space could have been used differently and the choice to utilize the walls as perimeter and shell for the work was deliberately made by the artist. In my opinion, the walls function as limits to the work and accordingly they also serve as boundaries for the body: as its skin. This point will be developed in chapter “From Medical Vision to Viewer Participation” (Chapter 2).

With this thesis I will attempt to analyse how Annette Messenger’s work exemplifies a complex set of negotiations between body and space: negotiations between the actual domain of the real body of the viewer and the three-dimensional (virtual) domain of the represented body and represented spaces. Together the performative body and the spectator’s participatory body constitute the notion of a body, which is increasingly being immersed in the dialectics of mediated experience. Successfully, it is the performative and interactive body (the sensual body that constitutes our very being) that

¹¹ This happened in Australia when the work was mounted for the *Islands: Contemporary Installations from Australia, Asia, Europe and America* exhibition. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 31 August-27 October 1996.

counterbalances Messenger's disavowal of the mortal obsolete body (that which sentences us to non-being). Consequently, the body in *Penetration* is unsettling. It is the paradoxical conjunction of its affirmation and its denial - characteristic of the present condition - that disturbs the viewer.

3) The Human Body and its Representations

Although the physical human body has not particularly changed since the beginning of times - size, weight - our access to it has. Over the course of the past century artists and scholars have interrogated the way in which the body has been depicted and how it has been envisioned.

Because the human body is a material organism as well as a metaphor it seems difficult to determine with certainty what the body is. In Western society, since Christianity, in terms of intellectual activities the body seems to have always been looked upon with scepticism as the site of unruly passions and appetites that might disrupt the pursuit of truth and knowledge. Also the origin of our Western culture's philosophical text for the body is the work of René Descartes. Descartes defined an attitude toward the body that characterized all subsequent modern philosophy. From his writings onward, body and mind are generally contemplated as mutually exclusive and the body is thought as being the "prison" that the mind must escape to achieve knowledge.

Although Western theory has advanced the reading of the body since René Descartes, it is only since the early 1970s that the body has assumed a critical presence on the stage of interdisciplinary cultural studies and recently (in the course of the past decades) the body has become at the center of theoretical debates. Identified as a site to be explored, one can recognize the value of historian Thomas Laqueur's affirmation that "the body is one of the great political arenas of our time."¹²

At a time when the body is being rethought and reconsidered by artists and writers as well as restructured and reconstituted by scientists and engineers, systems of order must be re-evaluated. Therefore, today's era offers a critical methodological opportunity to reformulate theories of culture, self, and experience, with the body at the center of the analysis. Although the body is thought by health-care practitioners as being a neutral and obvious assemblage of structural "facts," recently, cultural historians have shown that the story of the body is not quite so straightforward. In a new trend called "body history" the idea of the body as an immutable entity that is simply waiting to be discovered and explored has been challenged. Instead of tracing a story about the "fabric" of the body, historians are interested in how it may have been "fabricated." What I am interested in demonstrating is how the body's "construction" is influenced by the social and cultural pressures of time and place and how consequently, it can be understood why, simultaneously to critical thought, artists are interested in representing the body and the way it is constructed.

¹² Thomas Laqueur, "Clio Looks at Corporal Politics" in *Corporal Politics* (Cambridge, Boston, Massachusetts: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1992), 14.

Because the body presented in Annette Messager's *Penetration* is engaged with artistic and the medical discourses, this thesis will explore both disciplines with the intention of emphasizing the significance of anatomy - and anatomical illustration - in the reading of the contemporary body. In addition, because traditional anatomy as a descriptive science is to some extent limited - as the charting of the body calls for exacting visualization - Messager intentionally defies the notion of "serious" science that is attached to anatomy, by way of her artistic practice.

4) Contemporary Art and the Return of the Anatomical Body

The human body has, of course, always been an important theme in the history of art. And one of the major aspects of Western Art History has been the account of the representation of the human figure. Helaine Posner affirms in the *Corporal Politics* exhibition catalogue, "throughout time, the human figure has been the most valued instrument for exploring and asserting a culture's prevailing worldview."¹³

However, for a long time following the advent of the modernism the body was forgotten. In the era when the notion of "creating an illusion of the existence of objects" was denied altogether and painting was compelled to be autonomous, representation was loathed. Instead, pure form and pure vision were pursued.

¹³ Helaine Posner, "Separation Anxiety" in *Corporal Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1992), 22.

“Recent art history, however, reveals a significant shift in artists’ perceptions of the body.”¹⁴ The omnipresence of the body in contemporary production is an opportunity to inquire about its representation. In reality, in art, the body has never been as present as it has been since the 1960s. Today, the body is at the center of a complex debate. Scholarly and artistic production of the past decades present a human body which, far from being a self-evident organic whole, is at best a construct and a space, imagined very differently over time and across various cultural contexts. One of the ways the body has returned into “being” in contemporary history is through the common interest that scientific and artistic scholars and researchers have demonstrated a propos the study of anatomy.

It is beyond dispute that representations of the body are a means for generating dynamic cultural meanings, structuring complex social relations and establishing flows of power. As Diane R. Karp asserts in *Ars Medica: Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*: “there has been a renewal of interest on the part of contemporary artists in figurative concerns and in a narrative, sometimes allegorical or moralizing approach to themes of health and sickness in the modern world.”¹⁵ Because medicine entails the management of the body and its sensation we can value why contemporary artists - interested in the body and/or embodiment and/or identity - have taken interest in the medical field and more specifically in its methods of representation and means of production of knowledge.

¹⁴ Tracey Warr, Preface, in *The Artist’s Body*, ed. Tracey Warr (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 11.

¹⁵ Diane R. Karp, *Ars Medica: Art, Medicine and the Human Condition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), ix.

The separation of Art and Science is a relatively recent phenomenon in Human History. The philosopher scientists of Ancient Greece, the artist anatomists of the sixteenth century, the Natural Philosophers of the seventeenth century “scientific” societies considered themselves as “artists” working a different trade. From the Enlightenment period, for instance we have inherited the atlas and the anatomical method. Today, the invention of sophisticated machinery of visioning - from the microscope, radiological imaging (x-rays) to Positron Emission Tomography (PET) - has supplemented and intensified the aforementioned capacity to peer inside the human body as well as the ability to understand it.

Recently, there has been a rediscovery of “Science” by artists. In “Body Splits,” Amelia Jones alleges that “the bodies of the 1980s and 1990s artistic production... are with increasing frequency performed as technologized, ironicized, fragmented and open to otherness.”¹⁶ As technology and science pervades our life more and more and as forensic and medical sciences progress as never before - with the development of genetic fingerprinting, cryogenics, and designer babies - artists are “discovering” approaches as much as “creating” art - finding creativity in natural objects manipulated to a lesser or greater degree - and continue to find inspiration in the human body.

For many of us, anatomy may seem intimidating and unrewarding, but our fascination with our bodies is a powerful force, and once we start looking, we find that beauty is much more than skin-deep. In recent years, a kind of rapprochement between medical history and cultural theory has occurred, and new medical technologies (microscope,

¹⁶ Amelia Jones, “Body Splits” in *The Artist’s Body*, ed. Tracey Warr (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 40.

x-ray...) have become a source of inspiration for artists. In this thesis, I will clarify how both scientists and artists, are showing resurgent interest in anatomy, making it once again a vibrant and relevant area of image making and manipulation.

Although the experiments of the artists don't definitively advance science and knowledge, this doesn't suggest that they do not advance understanding and awareness. Accordingly, experiments on the body done by contemporary artists like Mona Hatoum, Damien Hirst, Kiki Smith and Annette Messager (amongst others) who test out taboos and imperatives, challenge conventional fears and reinvest in excluded possibilities. By blurring once more the frontier between science and art these artists' works can serve as important social experiments. In *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology*¹⁷, Brian S. Turner provides a framework for a new sub-field - namely, the development of the body - and identifies the importance of the body as limit. *Regulating Bodies* shows how the human body has long been ignored or neglected by mainstream social theory. In providing a general account of the problem of the body in modern society, Turner attempts to solve many of the existing epistemological and theoretical difficulties in social theories of the body. I believe and will explain, in this thesis, it is the body as limit that Annette Messager questions and tests.

In an era and society, where medical imagery offers numerous instruments to provide direct knowledge of the body's interior without "invasive" procedure and where we have

¹⁷ Brian S. Turner, *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992)

knowledge “of our depths only by way of planar images,”¹⁸ Messenger chooses a conventional way - Installation Art - to represent the body. However, with *Penetration* Messenger challenges the medical and artistic consensus and confronts the spectator/participant.

With this thesis I will argue that the artist strives to understand the human body, both artistically and anatomically, via its complexities by resorting to human clinical examination. I will also explain how the anatomical exploration of the body supports what has been identified as a “return” to the body and why Messenger’s undertaking of anatomy is a legitimate means which advances new ways of exploring and understanding the body.

5) Intention of the Thesis

Although Annette Messenger’s anatomical scrutiny is different from medical inquiry about the body - her concern being neither scientific nor didactic but rather clearly aesthetic and systematic - her choice of the standardized anatomical vocabulary as well as her use of certain visual metaphors and common techniques, which seem to occur repeatedly over the centuries in “medical art”, illustrates her willingness to participate within that specific field of expertise. Her representation of the “internal” body is evidently derived from scientific research and consensus. I contend *Penetration* is a contemporary adaptation of the traditional anatomical models as the body implied is anonymous and based on the

¹⁸ Philippe Comar, *Images of the Body* (New York: N. Abrams, [1993] 1999), 91.

medical normative model of the insides; thus, approximating the body in anatomy.

Represented as it customarily is in contemporary medical textbooks¹⁹ and/or medical atlases²⁰ of human anatomy - this point will be discussed at length in “*Penetration and Anatomical Illustration*” (Chapter 1) - Messenger’s “body” is turned inside/out and fragmented into individual organs and re-organized: put back together.

Messenger investigates the rich history of approaching, classifying and nurturing the body as it is understood in the medical tradition. She also draws attention to the subject matter of science. However, *Penetration* calls attention to our own standpoint and challenges us to imagine just how the visual culture of medicine looks, in time and place, to those outside its institutions. With its anatomically correct representation that promote an impression of scientific precision as well as allow for remarkable visualization, the installation gives the ability to demonstrate that in an era where medicine is technological, it is not necessary to use new technologies to represent the body’s interior. Furthermore, by doing so, I assume that Messenger questions medical representations of the human body and reveals the complex interplay among conventions of art, social customs, and descriptive modes of depiction in producing a framework that questions medical representation and knowledge of one’s own identity.

¹⁹ Textbooks on anatomy are more commonly textbooks on anatomy and physiology (A&P). They actually explain how the body works.

²⁰ An atlas of human anatomy is a book of pictures of all parts of the human physical body. Medical students and doctors usually use Atlases for study and reference. Many of which specialize in just some parts of the body.

In an era when medical imagery offers numerous instruments to provide direct knowledge of the body's interior without "invasive" procedure and where "the paradox of the image resides in this: that we have knowledge of our depths only by way of planar images..."²¹ the artist chooses a conventional way to represent the body (some may possibly even say a "regressive" one) to challenge the consensus - medical and artistic - as well as the spectator. The simplicity of forms, the use of materials and colour thrust the viewer inside a world that is both familiar and unusual: a world set half way between a fairy tale and a nightmare.

At first sight, the composition seems a confusion of incomplete internal organs all placed in representational space. The body parts are scattered, decontextualized and set in relation to the exhibition space. Upon closer inspection, the parts are arranged with some semblance of order, sequence or proportion. The artist gives an elaborate attention and attributes significance to the body part in and of itself. Since corporeal parts have distinct functions, locations, and distinctive relations to the body as a whole, they can become concentrated sites where meaning is invested and often apparently stabilized. But although the appeal of a specific body part may generate the illusion of a narrowed field of reference, it is in fact precisely this specificity that creates, in the corporeal fragment, a remarkable density of implication. Accordingly, the organs are invested with paradoxical power to simultaneously represent and misrepresent. For instance, the diagram of a heart is both what it represents: an "anatomical" heart and what it refers to: a "referent", a "symbol" of life, love, death... With that line of thought in mind, the question which comes to mind is: Does Messenger's composition accurately represent a body?

²¹ Philippe Comar, *Images of the Body* (New York: N. Abrams, [1993] 1999), 91.

6) Plan

In “From Flat-Anatomy to a Three-dimensional Body” (Chapter 1) *Penetration* will be examined in light of the long tradition of medical imagery. I will address the history of traditional anatomy, from the first mentions of anatomy, to the legal dissections in the fifteenth century and the contemporary understanding of both the human being - “Man” - and the body while positioning the installation piece within this history. In addition, I will examine Annette Messenger’s position within this discipline. My purpose is to explain how specific details and ideas presented in the work converge with selected elements of anatomical imagery. Simultaneously I will demonstrate how Messenger breaks away from the traditional bi-dimensionality of the practice by introducing notions of three-dimensionality.

In addition, I will argue that Messenger’s inquiry into anatomy provides her with a method that allows her to question the body’s clarification and delimitation as well as enabling her to show her fascination with its interior.

“From Medical Vision to Viewer Participation” (Chapter 2) focuses on how *Penetration* gains autonomy from contemporary medical imaging. I will analyse the artwork within the contemporary medical discourse on the body. I will clarify why *Penetration* contributes to the development of art history as well as discuss the relevance of such a work within our contemporary preoccupations about the body, its understanding and its representation.

With *Penetration* Messenger questions the recognition - observed in and since the nineteenth century - that science became the only provider of reliable, objective knowledge, replacing what religion had been in the past.

I will show that Messenger questions medical imagery as the true path toward security, comfort and social well-being. Via Installation Art and via the viewer's participation I will demonstrate how Messenger shows a strong interest in the role of embodiment in such processes as the constitution of identity, the formation of concepts, the structures of reason, knowledge practices and the emergence of values. By addressing the body's natural functions, Messenger's installation helps to redirect the attention beyond the body's external appearances towards more visceral concerns in order to comment on the body as something we are (being a body) and not only as something we have (having a body).

In "*Penetration* and the History of Spectatorship in Visual Art," (Chapter 3) I will explain how Annette Messenger draws on a vast repertoire of sources and stimuli that have permeated her life and work to varying degrees. I will demonstrate how the artist makes clear references to the recent past and additionally how *Penetration* works within a contemporary community of ideas. Various contemporary artists will be examined and specific contemporary works will be analyzed to underline Messenger's position.

I will demonstrate how Annette Messenger's *Penetration* is a significant example of the current in contemporary Art which is exemplified by a return to the materiality of the

body and to anatomy. However, I will also establish how this work stands inside contemporary Art History as an imaginative composition and creation.

In “Touching the Parts,” (Chapter 4) I will show how Annette Messenger proposes an inquiry into the body where the sense of touch becomes a key element in the work’s formation. The primordial fact of the human body is its capacity to hear, to touch, to desire, to fear, to crave bodily and psychic events which have an object in the external world. By taking an object, touch invites one to enter the natural world rather than to supplement it. With *Penetration*, besides inviting the viewer to invest the body’s interior (physically), Messenger encourages him or her to touch the organs. Although the installation recalls past histories - scientific as well as artistic - by way of tactility Messenger produces a body that becomes animated by the viewer’s body. Beyond this reading I want to suggest that Messenger figures embodiment as central to the understanding of lived reality and social relations.

As a result of the establishment of the sense of touch inside the work, I will prove that the viewers, immersed inside the arrangement and engaged with its parts, experience the represented body as well as their own body in an innovative way: a tactile way, and will demonstrate that this method is innovative.



Plate 1.

Annette Messenger

Penetration (Pénétration)

1993-1994

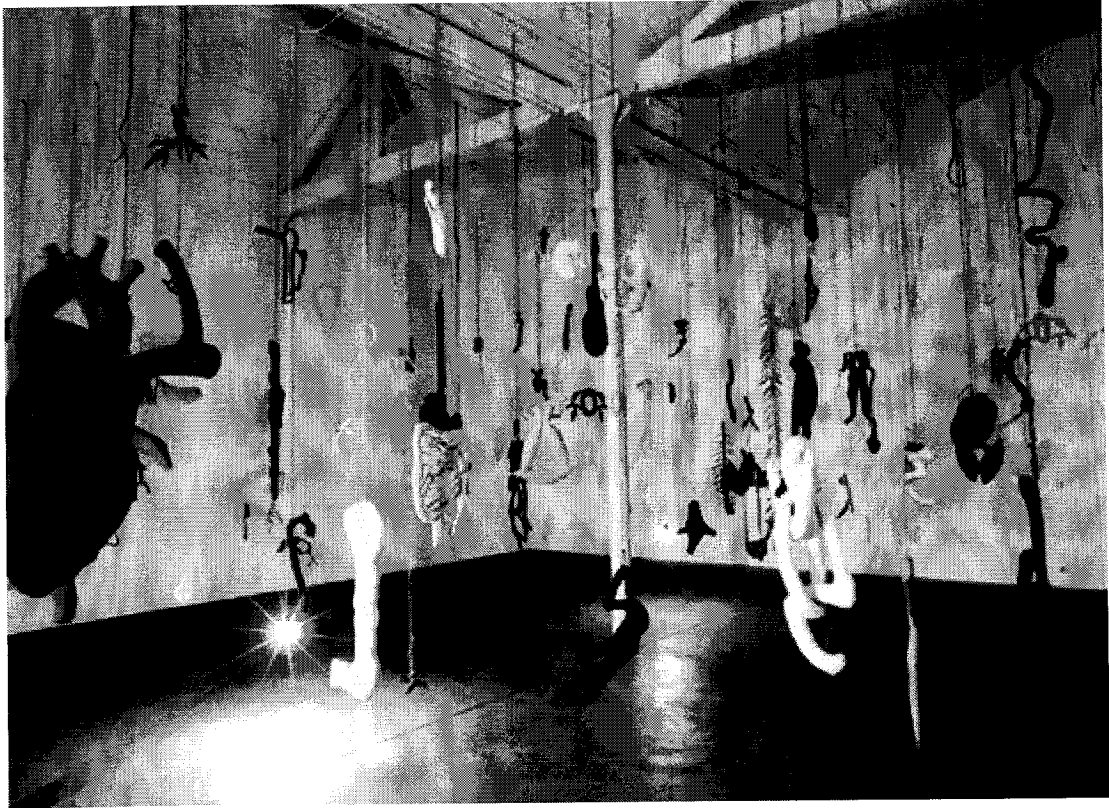


Plate 2.

Annette Messenger

Penetration (Pénétration)

1993-1994

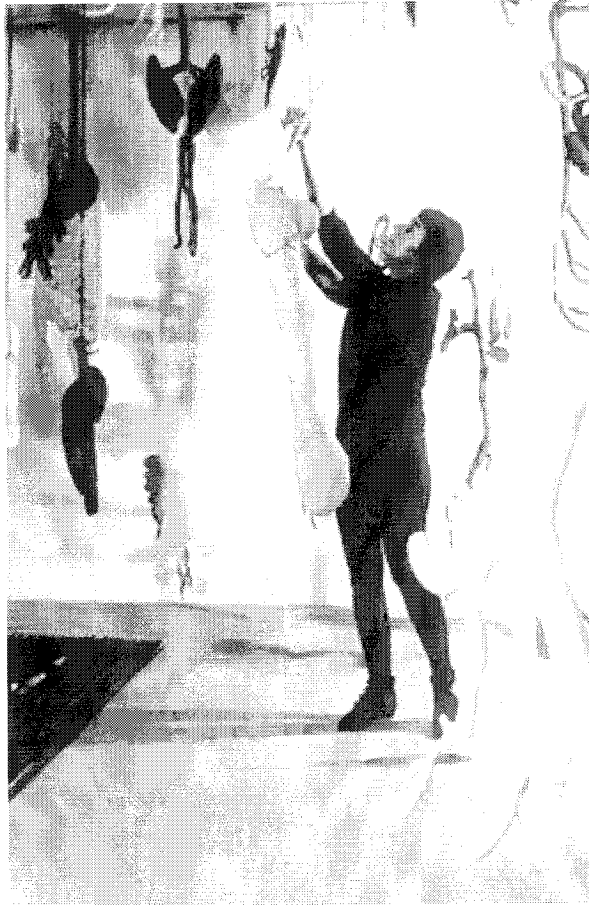


Plate 3.

Annette Messenger mounting *Penetration* in her Studio

1993



Plate 4.

Annette Messenger / Penetration

1993-1994

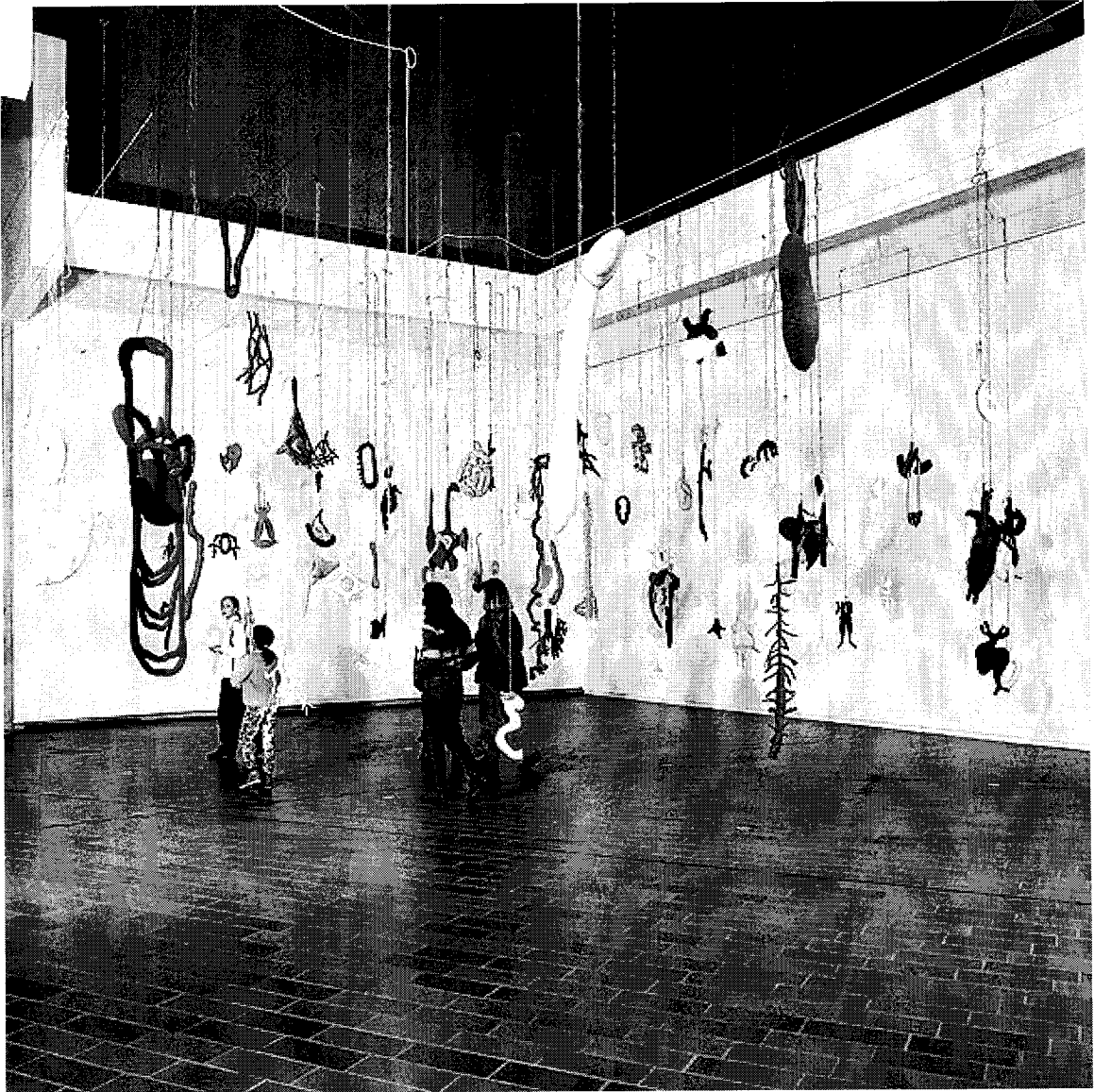


Plate 5.

Annette Messenger

Penetration (Pénétration)

1996

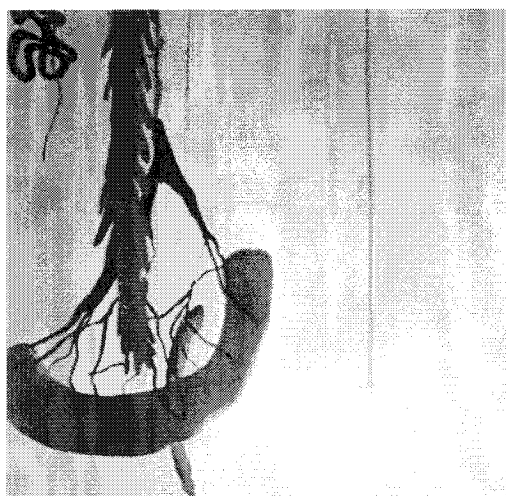


Plate 6.

Annette Messenger

Penetration (Pénétration)

Detail

1993-1994



Plate 7.

Annette Messenger

Penetration (Pénétration)

Detail

1993-94

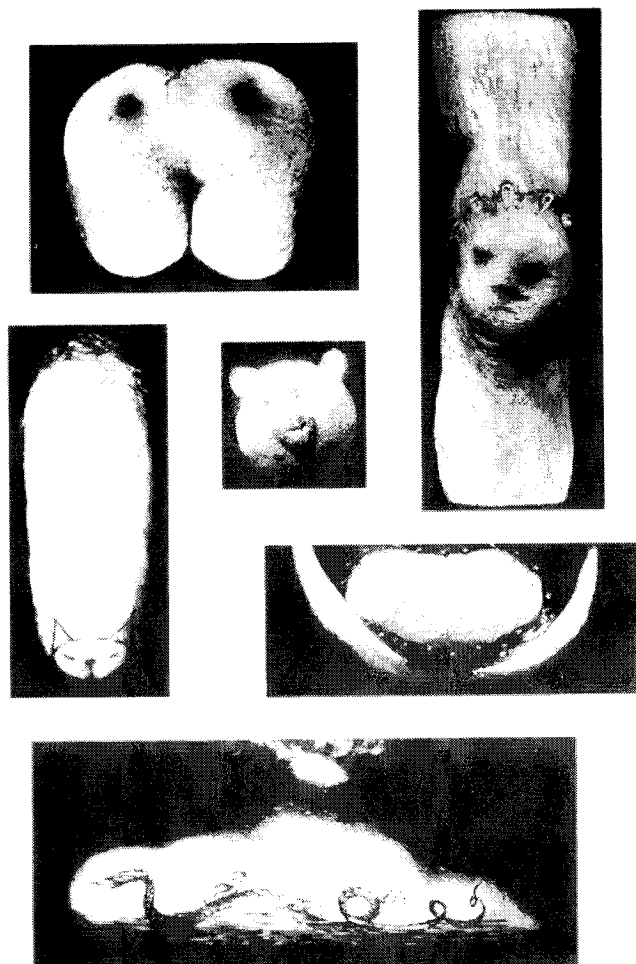


Plate 8.

Annette Messenger

My Trophies (Mes Trophées)

1988



Plate 9.

Annette Messenger

My Trophies (Mes Trophées)

Installation View, Galerie Laage-Salomon, Paris

1988



Plate 10.

Annette Messenger

My Trophies (Mes Trophées)

1987

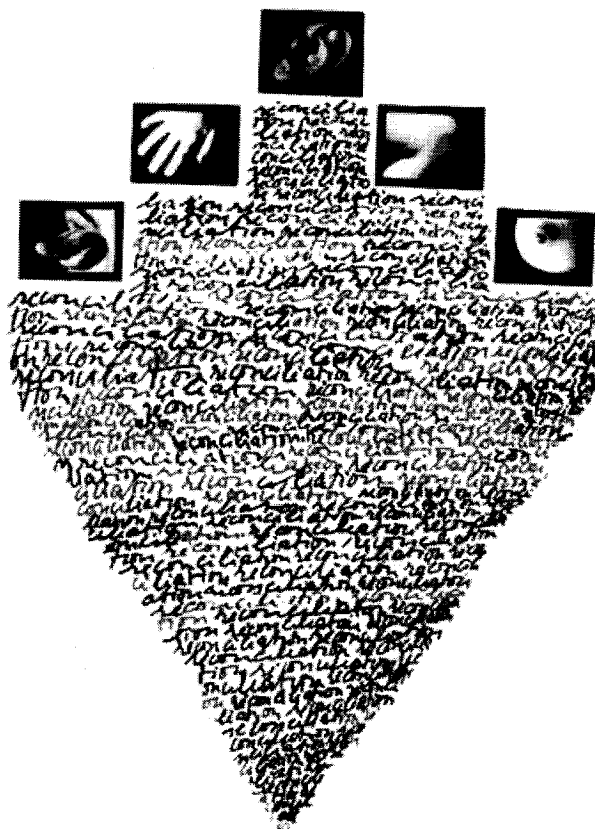


Plate 11.

Annette Messenger

My Works (Mes Ouvrages)

1988

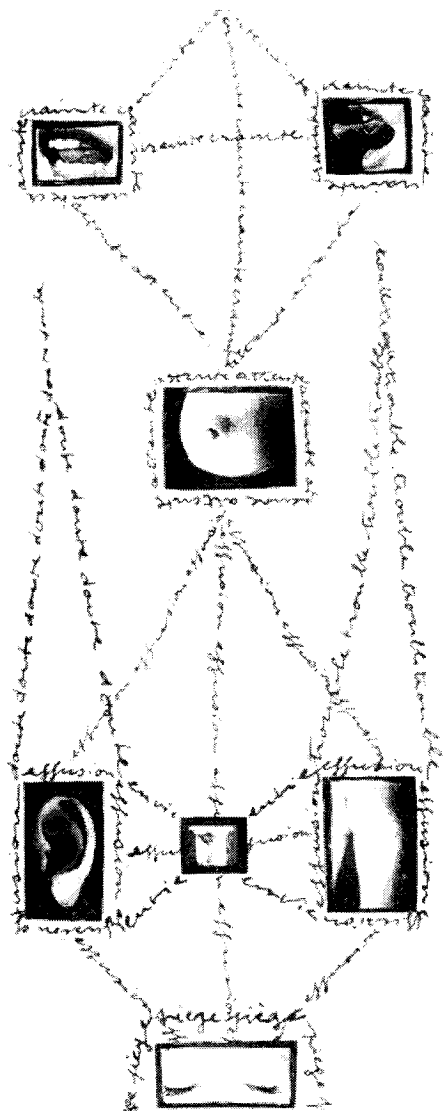


Plate 12.

Annette Messenger

My Works (Mes Ouvrages)

1988

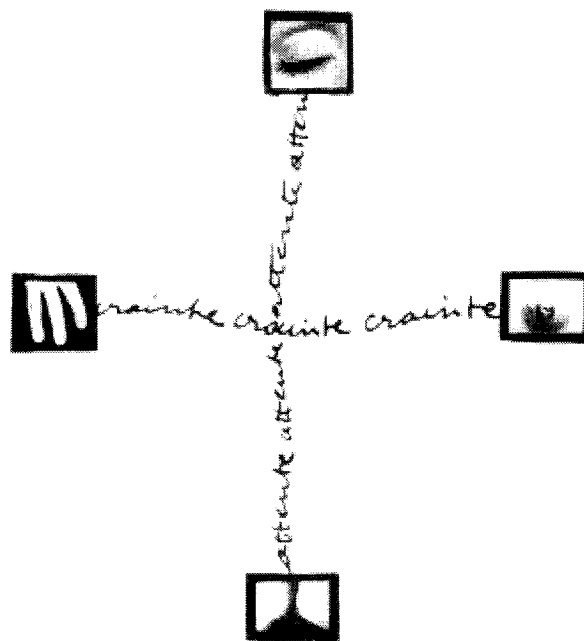


Plate 13.

Annette Messenger

My Works (Mes Ouvrages)

1988



Plate 14.

Annette Messenger

My Works (Mes Ouvrages)

1988

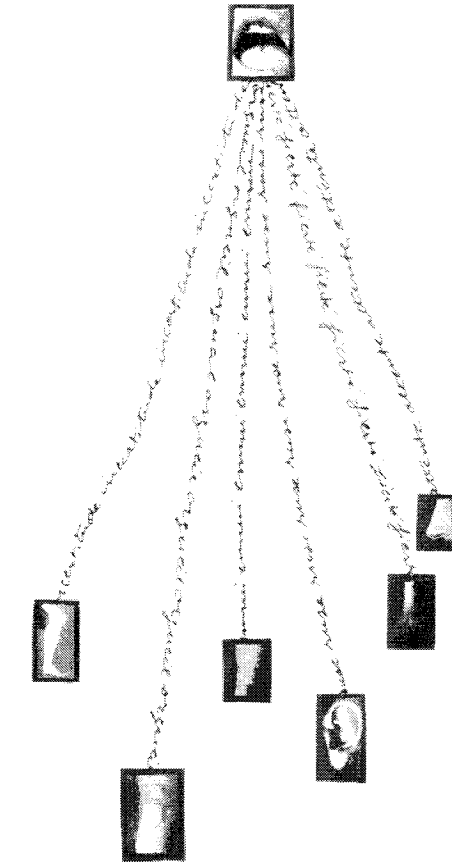


Plate 15.

Annette Messenger

My Works (Mes Ouvrages)

1988



Plate 16.

Annette Messenger

My Works (Mes Ouvrages)

1988



Plate 17.

Annette Messenger

My Works (Mes Ouvrages)

1988

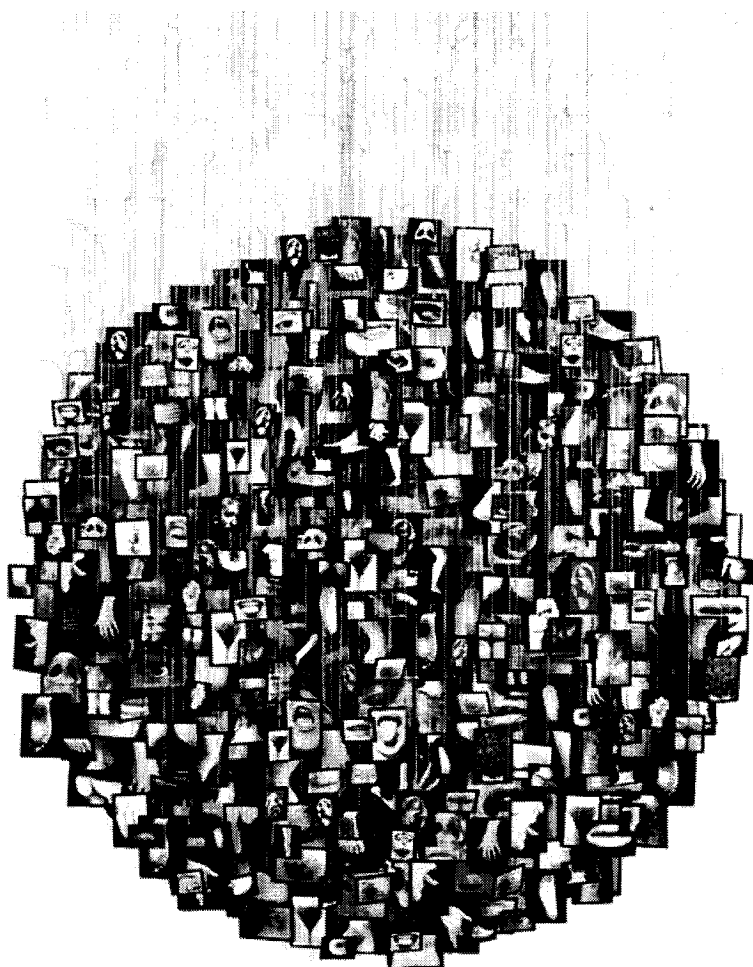


Plate 18.

Annette Messenger

My Vows (Mes Vœux)

1988-91

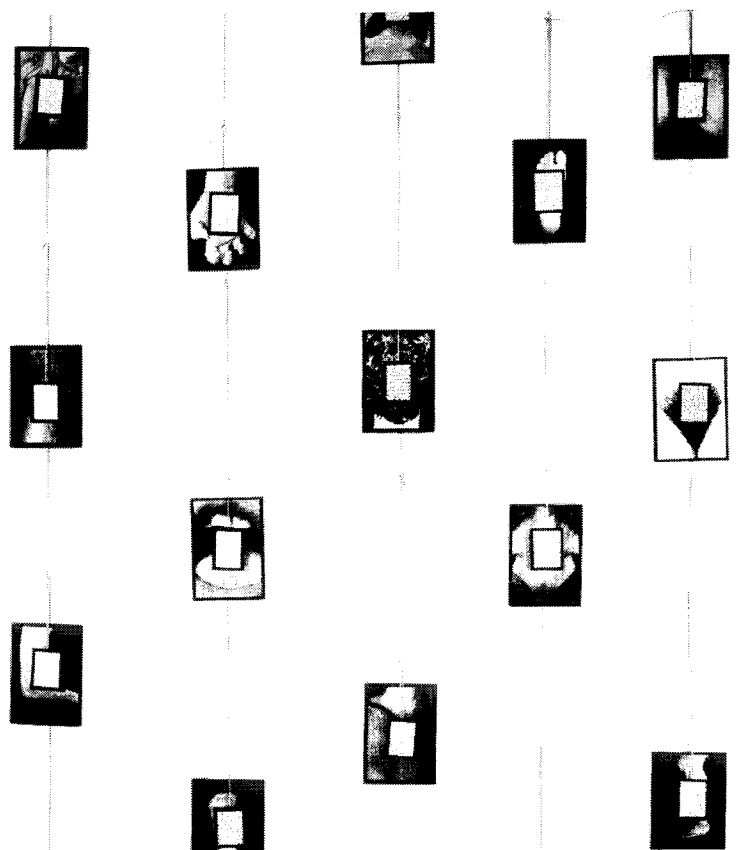


Plate 19.

Annette Messenger

My Wishes (Mes Vœux)

Detail

1989

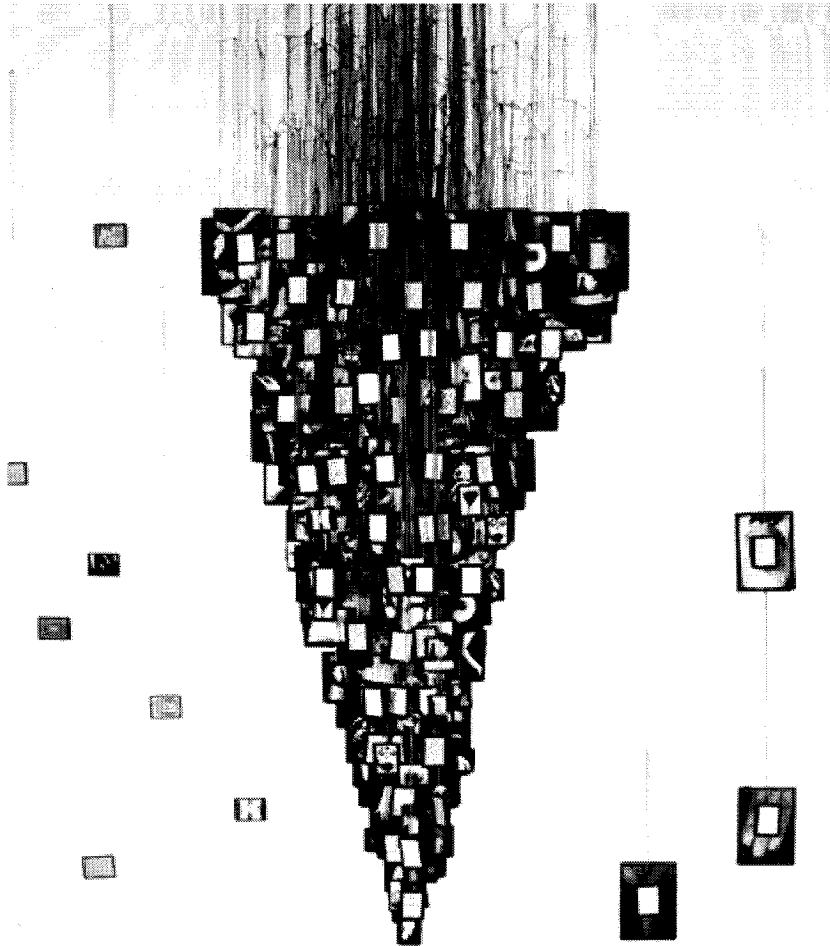


Plate 20.

Annette Messenger

My Wishes (Mes Vœux)

1989

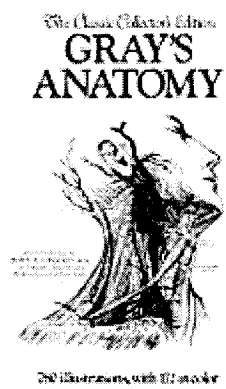


Plate 21.

Henry Gray

The Classic Collector's Edition. Gray's Anatomy

Cover

Random House, 2003

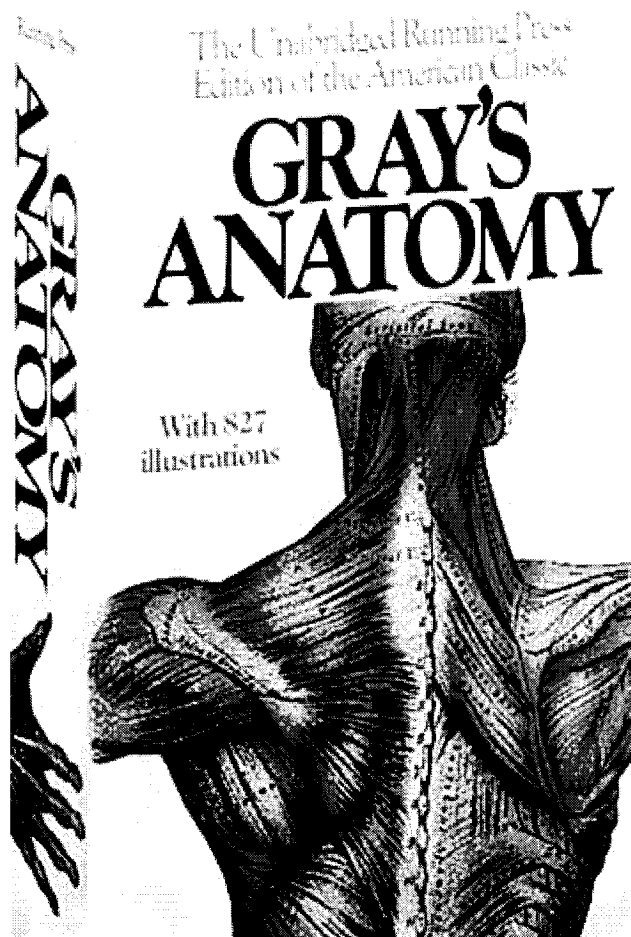


Plate 22.

Henry Gray

Gray's Anatomy: Descriptive and Surgical.

Cover

London: Barnes & Noble, 1978



Plate 23.

Jesús Raphael Soto

Penetrable

1962-1969

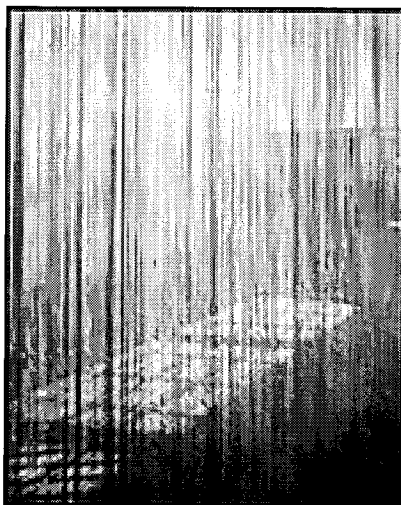


Plate 24.

Jesús Raphael Soto

Penetrable

1962-1969

CHAPTER I.

From Flat-Anatomy to a Three-Dimensional Body

“The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed.”

Albert Einstein.²²

With *Penetration* Annette Messenger is concerned with answering the question: what counts as a body today? The “human body” Messenger represents is far from being a self-evident organic whole. It is at best a construct and a phantasmatic space. Since Messenger builds her representation on the anatomical medical standard - as established in the twentieth-century and based on doctor Henry Gray’s anatomical model²³ - and because the different stages of development of anatomy and its representation facilitate our understanding of the evolution of the human body in science as well as in the social order, the analysis of anatomy will be valuable to examine what type of body Messenger is establishing. Looking back to the history of anatomical illustrations in order to resolve or rather open the discussion into the inquiry about the body, I will demonstrate that Messenger reshapes the map of the body and our understanding of embodiment by framing and re-framing the body, its organs and its limbs via *Penetration*.

²² Cited in Ulam Stanislaw, *Adventures of a Mathematician* (New York: Scribner, c.1976), 289.

²³ Henry Gray, *Anatomy, Surgical and Descriptive of the Human Body* (Philadelphia: Lea Febiger, 1918)

Inside *Penetration*, the body Messenger produces is anonymous, based on the normative medical model of the insides, anatomically descriptive and strangely symbolical. The components of this hanging composition make up a visual rendering of the elements with which we are composed.

Although new techniques have taken over from drawing as the method of re-presenting the body, Messenger is still fascinated with anatomical illustration. However, because traditional anatomy as a descriptive science is partly limited - as the charting of the body calls for exacting visualization - Messenger intentionally defies the notion of “serious” science and powerful medicine that is attached to anatomy, by way of her playful artistic practice.

With this chapter my intention is to establish that Messenger’s aesthetical and conceptual approach stages the site at which medicine and art collide. I will examine why and how Messenger builds her representation on the examination of the medical manuals - on scientific investigation and its accepted conventions - and why she uses anatomy as her point of origin. Subsequently, I will demonstrate that *Penetration* is based on anatomical illustration and that it is inscribed in pre-technological imagery. The artist’s visual metaphors and techniques will be investigated in view of the history of medical illustration, which will be examined from its first sign to today, with the aim of revealing how Messenger belongs to the long lineage of anatomical artists. Additionally, by shedding light on the history of anatomy and the history of anatomical imagery, the progress narrative of the human body and its representation in Western society will be

assessed and Messenger's understanding of the human body will be explained with regards to both past and current histories of the body.

As Messenger produces a work which introduces innovative concepts that allow her to break away from the anatomical tradition - by renewing its articulation, I will discuss how the artist equally transgresses the limitations of the subject of anatomy. *Penetration* is designed, staged, and arranged in such a way that the viewer/participant is driven to enter and travel inside the human topography. In this thesis I argue that by bringing in tri-dimensionality and by moving the anatomical body from a flat surface - illustration, photography etc. - to a volumetric composition, Messenger produces a work which introduces notions of space and time. In addition, I contend that the notion of the "in-between" - as determined by Daniel Sibony²⁴ - advances the reading of the work as well as the understanding of the experience inside it. For Sibony, a psychoanalyst and doctor in mathematics and philosophy who leads seminars in psychoanalysis and literary writings, the "in-between" is a sort of cut-link between two terms, where both terms are correlated. According to him one edge doesn't divide the two terms, rather the two edges of each item touch each other such that fluxes circulate between them. In *Penetration*, I will establish that Messenger's questioning resides in the "in-between," inside the body, inside the motion.

²⁴ Daniel Sibony, *Entre-Deux, l'origine du partage* (Paris: Seuil, 1991)

1) *Penetration and Anatomical Illustration*

Across time artists and scholars have interrogated the way in which the body has been depicted and how it has been envisioned, and anatomists have used illustrations equally to study anatomy and publish their discoveries. From the beginning of anatomical representations, anatomical atlases have been illustrated by artists because of their perceptual abilities, their attention to detail, and their use of perspective in draftsmanship. Although the tradition of anatomical illustration is sustained today, “specialized” medical illustrators rather than “fine artists” work with anatomists and illustrate publications. As a result, art and anatomy have been closely tied to the medical establishment (the authority has appropriated for itself this anatomical material.) The philosopher scientists of Ancient Greece, the artist anatomists of the sixteenth century and the natural philosophers of the seventeenth century “scientific” societies all saw themselves as “artists” working a different trade. As the artist, writer and professor of drawing at the Royal College of Art, London, Deanna Petherbridge says, in *The Quick and the Dead*, “in order to represent bodies in all their beauty, artists have needed to study anatomy.”²⁵ As early as the fifteenth century, “artist-anatomists” contributed to the newly emerging “sciences” of body knowledge through dissections and drawings. Accordingly, as the study of anatomy was regarded as particularly important it was included in academic instruction - very early on in the Italian academies and in the seventeenth century in the French *Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture*. However, academic training disappeared from most art

²⁵ Deanna Petherbridge, “Art and Anatomy: The Meeting of Text and Image,” in *The Quick and the Dead: Artists and Anatomists*, eds. Deanna Petherbridge and Ludmilla Jordanova (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

schools of the post-Second World War as artists moved away from bodily representation to concentrate on abstract compositions.²⁶

According to the writer and professor of morphology at the *École Nationale Des Beaux-Arts de Paris*, Philippe Comar, medical knowledge of the body was long restricted to what could be observed externally yet “theology and the sciences gradually shifted humanity’s position in the world away from its supreme place” since “human beings wanted to see themselves fully, and to establish for themselves a fixed standard of measurement.”²⁷ Dissection and the investigation of anatomy became the means to achieve that. From an artist’s point of view, starting with the Renaissance, the study of anatomy became fundamental for the understanding of the human form. From then onwards, in addition to being known through the study of nude models, artists - like scientists - who were interested in knowing the body and the internal workings of the human being would turn to anatomical examination. Throughout history, the body was re-thought and reconsidered by artists and writers because it had been restructured and reconstituted by scientists and engineers.

From the point of view of medicine, the anatomists are the first who, through their treatises, gave the body an interior image. They absorbed themselves into the opened body, where they extracted (with their eyes) knowledge and have reproduced to their greatest ability (with their hands) the human structure. The dead body, the corpse, became the measure of the living being, and consequently death became one of the

²⁶ Deanna Petherbridge, “Art and Anatomy: The Meeting of Text and Image,” id., 10.

²⁷ Philippe Comar, *Images of the Body* (New York: Abrams, 1999), 69.

factors epistemologically integrated into scientific knowledge. With the discovery of new technological tools - such as photography and the x-ray²⁸ - new ways of “seeing” the body became possible, which led to new ways of re-presenting it. In view of that, artists today no longer refer to “figure” drawing but to the “body.” Both terms are understood as a historical and cultural underlying variable. And as such they are determined by social, historical and cultural contexts. The term “figure” refers to the examination of the body for its line and form. However, in recent years the body re-entered discursive practices as a carrier of identity, sexuality, race and/or class. Because in time the figure has taken on a range of politically charged meanings and as it has lately frequently been associated with issues of gender and identity, it has been labeled and has become “the body.”

In the 1997 book *The Quick and the Dead: Artists and Anatomists* Ludmilla Jordanova explains that for centuries, human beings strove to understand the complexities of the body, both artistically and anatomically.²⁹ The comparative exploration of historical medical art directed at revealing certain visual metaphors and common techniques that occur repeatedly over the centuries highlights the theory that, across time, individuals - not only artists - have sought progressive ways to illustrate and understand the structure and functions of the internal body.

Today, as technology and science saturate our life increasingly and as forensic and medical sciences advance rapidly, a number of contemporary artists are finding

²⁸ Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen discovered that x-rays could produce images of the skeletal system in 1895.

²⁹ Ludmilla Jordanova, “Happy Marriages and Dangerous Liaisons: Artists and Anatomy,” in *The Quick and the Dead: Artists and Anatomists*, eds. Diana Petherbridge and Ludmilla Jordanova, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 100-113.

stimulation in natural objects and creating art which has the human body and particularly the anatomical body as inspiration. Concurrently, they are discovering new approaches to symbolize this anatomical body. This point will be discussed thoroughly in “*Penetration and the history of Spectatorship in Contemporary Art.*”

2) *Penetration and the Tradition of Anatomy*

Penetration stems from the tradition of anatomy while simultaneously renewing it. In tracing the origin of Messenger’s subject of inquiry one needs to go back to the history of anatomy in Antiquity. For today’s society, the study of anatomy in Antiquity reveals how the inquiry about the body’s interior is an ancient fascination. We can trace the oldest known methodical study of anatomy to an Egyptian treatise dating from about 3000 B.C. However, “it is from the Greeks that we derive almost all our medical nomenclature”³⁰ and the methods and the applications of our anatomical discipline. In *History of Medicine*, haematologist Jacalyn Duffin asserts that the teleological philosophy of Aristotle³¹ dominated much of the early study of anatomy and physiology since he argued that every organ had its own function which could be deduced from its structure.³² Aristotle’s observations were nevertheless limited as he only dissected plants and

³⁰ Charles Singer and E. Ashworth Undewood, *A Short History of Medicine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 16.

³¹ Aristotle: Greek philosopher and biologist. (384-322 B.C.) Most of Aristotle’s works -including, but not limited to, the biological ones - proceed by classification and taxonomy of ideas, and one of his recurring arguments is that the form (of, for instance, an animal) is determined by its ultimate function, or *telos*.

³² Jacalyn Duffin, *History of Medicine: A Scandalous Short Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1999), 14.

animals, and never examined a human body. Hippocrates - considered the father of medicine, since he based his diagnoses and prescriptions on empirical observation of patients - never examined a cadaver either.³³ It was only in the third century B.C. that the first school of anatomy was founded by Herophilus of Chalcedon who encouraged his students to overcome their fear of dissecting human bodies.³⁴ The word anatomy implies cutting, and also structure or morphology: i.e. the shape, size and relationships of body parts. Epistemologically it is derived from the Latin word “dissectus”³⁵ which means to separate into pieces or to analyze and interpret minutely but also comes from the Greek “ana” which means up or through and “tome” meaning cutting. In its early stages anatomy dealt simply with the parts which formed the fully developed individual and which could be rendered evident to the naked eye by various methods of dissection.

The examination into Antiquity gives the understanding that observation, although essential, isn't adequate to create knowledge. Pertaining to *Penetration* the observation

³³ Hippocrates: Doctor who worked on the Greek island of Cos. (460-370 B.C.) He developed a new approach to medicine by refusing to use gods to explain illnesses and disease. This meant that medicine came to be seen as a science rather than a religion. He stressed the importance of observation, diagnosis and treatment and developed the theory of the body having four humours; black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. Illness occurred, he believed, if one of these humours was out of balance and the body therefore contained too much or too little of it. His ideas were a strange mixture of commonsense and factual inaccuracies. His suggestions about diet and exercise are as valid today as they were 2,400 years ago, as was his use of observation. However, his belief in the Four Humours was completely wrong. Strangely enough, this theory lasted until the 17th century, but the importance of exercise and diet was forgotten after the Romans. His most important contributions were in the development of the medical profession and in a code of conduct for doctors.

³⁴ Herophilus himself dissected about six hundred human bodies and wrote a number of anatomical treatises, demonstrating that the brain is the center of the nervous system and showing the distinction between voluntary and involuntary nerves.

³⁵ Past participle of *dissecare* to cut apart, from *dis* and *secare* to cut. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary copyright, Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2004.

- alone - of the work is insufficient. Looking alone is not enough. Entering the arrangement however provides the viewer with the necessary information and experience that he or she needs to identify with Messenger's body.

Within past history, the Greek physician Galen of Pergamum's work *De usu partium* (*On the Use of Parts*) served as a standard medical text for nearly a millennium and a half.³⁶ Some of his discoveries - for instance, the function of the kidneys - were advances based on empirical observation but Galen performed no human dissections and made a number of errors. Despite his improvements on earlier anatomical studies and his other achievements, he is often remembered for the fact the Catholic Church did not allow his ideas to be criticized. Consequently, many of his erroneous ideas were perpetuated. In *Galen of Pergamum and the Medical Renaissance*, Vivian Nutton affirms that in the Renaissance, the 'reborn' Galen encouraged the development of anatomy and medical botany, clinical medical teaching, and epidemiology, even if by following Galen's methods Galen's own errors were revealed more clearly.³⁷ This illustrates that although knowledge relies on observation, conclusions may occasionally depend on assumptions and traditions.

Before the advent of adequate technology - which recorded the body "faithfully" - charting the body called for exacting and inventive visualization with the artists

³⁶ Galen of Pergamum: Greek physician who lived from c.130-c.200. Galen's medical writings became the standard source of medical knowledge for centuries. He is credited with some 500 treatises. As his culture forbade the dissection of human cadavers he based his human anatomy primarily on the ape and on common quadrupeds such as cattle, pigs and dogs.

³⁷ Vivian Nutton, Department of Anatomy and Developmental Biology, University College London, 1999. Vivian Nutton, *From Democedes to Harvey: Studies in the History of Medicine* (London: Variorum, 1998).

documenting what they saw, but what they weren't able to see they created. The distinctiveness of each artist's representation of the human body demonstrates that artists were preoccupied with anatomical detail. As Diane R. Karp declares in the 1985 Exhibition Catalogue of prints, drawings, and photographs from the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art entitled *Ars Medica. Art Medicine and the Human Condition*: "(in the fourteenth century) anatomy was not a field of research or a science of discovery but a ceremony aimed at verifying and illustrating the texts and treatises of the ancient authorities or providing documentary support for forensic purposes."³⁸ As anatomists were still subject to cultural and religious traditions and since the intention of many was to memorize the body rather than make discoveries and enlarge knowledge, the anatomical achievements were exclusively of a literary character.

Messenger's process also stems from the literary as she chooses to represent organs according to the conventional scientific consensus and like the anatomists of the past she also memorizes the body. Using the standardized anatomical model - as elaborated in contemporary time with Gray's *Anatomy* - Messenger places herself within a systematic lineage - of anatomical artists - while simultaneously creating a work which displaces the field to the subversive. By dismembering anatomy and by selecting and dramatizing certain elements - the heart, the brain, a foetus... - the artist goes beyond mere reference and pushes the citation further. Messenger's work, like anatomy in Antiquity, is based on observation and the acceptance of established models. However, the work is also based

³⁸ Diane R. Karp, *Ars Medica: Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), xi.

on choices which encourage new open approaches of analysis and adds “concepts” that did not exist at the time: that of modern experience and spectatorship.³⁹

By the end of the thirteenth century and in the fourteenth century, art and anatomy both experienced changes, fostered by legislative changes, the decline of religious teaching and reactions to criminal violence or epidemic diseases. The demand for accurate information became so great that medical dissection of human corpses became critical and municipalities (especially in Italy) were pressured to allow dissection in order to determine the cause of death in cases of murder or other unusual situations. In *A Short History of Anatomy from the Greeks to Harvey*, author Charles Singer even believes that the opening of the body began as part of the forensic process.⁴⁰

Although the fourteenth century brought a scientific attitude to the study of the human body, to some extent, artists rather than scientists, set the pace in revealing new aspects on human anatomy as they were engaged in anatomical dissections to perfect their understanding of the human form. Art historian, A. Hyatt Mayor observed that “once the Renaissance artists started dissecting they quickly discovered more than the doctors ever had about the look and functioning of the bones and muscles... Artists saw what the doctors had not seen because they approached anatomy with an entirely different practical purpose...”⁴¹ A renewed interest in anatomy was felt, in part urged by studies of

³⁹ This point will be discussed thoroughly in “From Contemporary Medical Vision to Visitor Participation.”

⁴⁰ Charles Singer, *A Short History of Anatomy from the Greeks to Harvey: The Evolution of Anatomy*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 70.

⁴¹ A. Hyatt Mayor, *Artists and Anatomists*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams , 1984), 48-49.

such artists as Leonardo da Vinci, who studied anatomy as an art form. His drawings were designed to guide other artists and they marked the beginning of the systemic study of the human body.⁴² Doctors treated the sick for subjective illness, suffering, and dysfunction, but except for fractures and dislocations, did not deal with internal medicine and they could not correlate disease with internal organs, which could be neither visualized nor altered during life and/or even studied after death because of social and cultural beliefs. As a result, medical progress and the understanding of the internal body was slowed. In *Ars Medica. Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*, Diane R. Karp shows that doctors and artists were to collaborate if they wanted to trace the body's interior⁴³ and improve the body's understanding. Just as the renewal of the understanding of the body and embodiment was supported by a collaboration between the two fields, Messenger does the equivalent with *Penetration*.

In order to understand the mechanisms of the world, human beings in the Renaissance could either look backward to the authority of the classical texts, or forward to the discoveries he or she could make through his own observations and intellectual investigation. The fifteenth century would work through both paths. A re-naissance, or re-birth of interest in the sciences spread from Italy through Europe. Simultaneously a re-discovery of the ancient Greek and Roman texts was combined with a new, more rigorous approach to the study of science. The revival of learning, the invention of

⁴² Many of these works are now found at the Royal Library of Windsor.

⁴³ "Although the physician's eye and hand were trained in the techniques of dissection, he was rarely capable of recording his observations with the degree of competence necessary to convey all he had found. On the other hand, while the artist who wanted to understand the mechanism of the human body to render it more accurately might be skilled in the recording of observed reality, he was often not sufficiently trained to dissect the human body properly, and therefore needed an experienced hand to expose and isolate each element or system within it."

printing, and the great voyages of discovery gave a new impulse to thought. Medical science questioned the old theological way of thinking giving way to a different mode of looking at the universe and consequently at the body. The plague is one of the most interesting and argued causes. The plague validated a rising scepticism toward the teaching of Galen and the Church because the “good” seemed to die as readily as the “sinful.” Uncertainty regarding the cause of disease that pertained from the middle ages - i.e. that diseases were sent by god, due to the planets, bad air, or to imbalance of the humours. The plague also affected art as people became accustomed to the spectacle of corpses on the street and as the horror of human remains tended to diminish the anxiety people had towards death. Vivid depictions of the inevitability of death and the transience of earthly pleasures and achievements flourished to become a favoured artistic subject matter.

In the medical field, the older system of organizing medical and anatomical information based on sets of ‘aphorisms’, or authoritative maxims passed on from generation to generation was replaced by the arrangement of information into subject categories or bodies of knowledge, with anatomy being one of them.⁴⁴ Science was developed through the new respect for empirical observation and the will to find repeatable and systemic techniques for recording the results of observation. All this was accomplished partly due to the advances made by the artists/anatomists. Their pictorial and communicative achievements were valuable for the dissemination of knowledge to the public through the

⁴⁴ Mimi Cazort, “The Theater of the Body,” in *The Ingenious Machine of Nature. Four Centuries of Art and Anatomy*, Mimi Cazort, Monique Kornell, Kenneth B. Roberts (contributors) (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1996), 14.

birth of a more rationalized and new perception of the natural world and the individual's relation to it.

With the first legal dissections, which were done mainly by artists, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and the relative popularization of that practice in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, a key moment in the history of Western thought occurred and led to the understanding of the body as a sum of parts. According to Swiss historian and art historian Jacob Burckhardt the Renaissance was a period marked by the rise of the individual⁴⁵. In *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, anthropologist, David Le Breton assesses that during that era, "Man" was considered as distinct from his body and was subjected to the singular paradox of *having* a body.⁴⁶ Yet, in *The Body in Parts*, David Hillman and Carla Mazzio support the analysis that the Renaissance should be reformulated as a period marked by the rise of the individual part - rather than that of the individual - since early modern culture indicated the occurrence "of what may be called a new aesthetic of the part"⁴⁷ and "the negotiation between parts and wholes became an especially vexed issue in the somatic structures of early modern Europe."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization in the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) Trans. S.G.C. Middlemore, 1878.

⁴⁶ David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), 47.

⁴⁷ David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, "Individual Parts" in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), xiv.

⁴⁸ David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, "Individual Parts," id., xiii.

Penetration is made of human body parts or, to be more precise, of pieces of human bodies. In the context it is presented in, Messenger's body alludes to Renaissance anatomy as it focuses on individual parts.

Amongst other things what Renaissance artists accomplished is help cast away Renaissance reverence for text over the experience of the senses. The demand by artists and the public for three-dimensionality in some ways - i.e. the construction on a bi-dimensional surface of the illusion of three-dimensionality through light effects, color and perspective - countered the need to reproduce the learned theories of Antiquity. This concern with three-dimensionality also connects Messenger's work to Renaissance anatomy. However, with *Penetration*, Messenger's three-dimensionality is epitomized by the fact that the work can literally be (or not be) penetrated and thus be (or not be) physically experienced as the body (and the viewer) moves and lives in space and time.⁴⁹

During the sixteenth century, knowing the body was a way to disclose the wonders of God's creation. The anatomist's pursuit of the final cause of structure, and his frequent ability to find it, made him seem both a possessor of "godlike" powers and a skilled investigator of sensible phenomena. The central ambition of the anatomist is outlined in the preface Vesalius wrote for *De Humani Fabrica* (Fig.24): "to negate false representation of reality and present the unadorned truth to the eyes of his readers."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Point which will be developed in "From Contemporary Medical Vision to Viewer Participation."

⁵⁰ Devon L. Hodges, *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 3.

Lecturer, demonstrator and dissector in one, Doctor Andreas Vesalius contributed in a major way to anatomical understanding. Known largely through his books and the reactions of others to them, through his technical skill with the knife, and his readiness to let the evidence of what he observed determine what he was prepared to believe (no matter how unpleasantly radical that might appear) and through his abundant learning that enabled him also to grasp the significance of his observations and to express them clearly, coherently and with conviction, Vesalius symbolizes the anatomist par excellence - as re-defined (through him) in the sixteenth-century.

Throughout history various scholars have acknowledged how Vesalius' works mark a major change in anatomical illustration. In *The Ingenious Machine of Nature: Four Centuries of Art and Anatomy*, Dean of the College of Pharmacy at the University of Kentucky and author, K. B. Roberts asserts Vesalius' "anatomical illustration was not a decoration superimposed on anatomical science - it was at the centre of the subject."⁵¹ Although Messenger considers that each viewer brings his or her own truth inside the work her attitude towards anatomy recalls Vesalius' since anatomy is at the centre of her inquiry about the body. With Messenger, anatomy becomes the vehicle that enables the viewer to question his or her own body as well as that of others: its integrity, its totality, its interiority. Simultaneously, the subject of anatomy allows him or her to identify Messenger's understanding of the human body.

⁵¹ Mimi Cazort, Monique Kornell, Kenneth B. Roberts (contributors), *The Ingenious Machine of Nature: Four Centuries of Art and Anatomy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, University of Chicago Press, 1997), 73.

With *Penetration* Messenger is doing what Vesalius had done before her, which is renew the understanding of the body's structure. Messenger isolates the human organs. This doesn't seem as innovative as it really is since the anatomical body we know today is one which is fragmented. However, where Messenger innovates is in presenting these organs as three-dimensional and clustered in a random way - or not - inside the exhibition space.

In order to understand how Messenger and Vesalius can be compared, Vesalius's methodology needs to be examined. Although various illustration techniques have played a role in the advancement of early anatomical studies Modern anatomy began with Andreas Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1537-1543).⁵²

With the anatomists and particularly with Vesalius the implicit distinction between the human being and his body was born in the Western episteme. The body became linked to having and not to being. From then onwards, the body would be dissociated from the human being (Man), studied for itself, as an autonomous reality. As such the body stopped to be the sign of the human being's immanence or that of the cosmos' ubiquity.⁵³ Vesalius did visualize, for the first time, the true structure of the human body and transform the science of anatomy.⁵⁴ Actually, the *Fabrica* provided a more extensive and accurate description of the human anatomy than any other book before it. Not only did it

⁵² *De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem* is an encyclopedic work of 663 pages containing a spectacular series of more than 200 anatomical woodcuts. Fashioned during the years 1537 to 1543, it is certainly the most famous anatomical work ever published.

⁵³ André Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, id., 50.

⁵⁴ Karp Diane A., *Ars Medica. Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*, id., xii.

"...*De Humani Corporis Fabrica* exemplifies the new Humanistic approach whereby man came to trust his own senses in assessing and exploring the world around him."

establish the value of good illustrations in the teaching of anatomy, but it also showed further advancement in the biological sciences which could not occur without pictures. It revolutionized not only the science of anatomy but also how it was taught. Vesalius' assertion that the dissection of cadavers must be performed by the physician himself, marked an epochal transition from Galen's teaching that had dominated medical science for fourteen centuries.

Vesalius replaced reliance on dogmatic established authority with observation, illustration and action - since doctors lectured and dissected at the same time - as the primary method of anatomy. Where before him, dissections were performed by barber - surgeons and supervised by demonstrators, Vesalius encouraged the doctors to descend from "the chair" and to do their own dissections. Vesalius put the study of science and medicine on a new course by demonstrating errors by Galen in public anatomies, and insisting that medical students test the facts of human anatomy with their own hands and eyes⁵⁵. This approach would ultimately lead to the discovery of the circulation of blood by William Harvey⁵⁶ in 1628.

⁵⁵ Vesalius showed that Galen's anatomy was merely an attempt to apply animal structure to the human body and was not based on any direct knowledge of human anatomy.

⁵⁶ William Harvey was an English physician and anatomist. (1578-1657). He studied at the University of Padua (the newly established center of medical research) several years after Vesalius taught there. In 1628, Harvey published *An Anatomical Treatise on the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals*, in which he described for the first time how blood is pumped by the contractions of the heart, circulates throughout the body, and returns to the heart. Both the accurate plan of the circulation and the idea that the heart is a pump were enormous breakthroughs that helped overcome the primitive ideas of Aristotle and Galen once and for all. Although his discovery was attacked by Galen's followers it was difficult to argue against his methods of first-hand observation and experimentation.

De Humani Fabrica is a unique work as it is composed in Latin. Vesalius abandoned the logical sequence of thought characteristic of the scientific literature of that period. Instead he reintroduced the terminology of a time long past and was the first anatomist to do so. The Classical Latin style in which he formulated his findings made it rather difficult for the average physician of his day to understand the content of his work. Therefore, much of the influence the *Fabrica* was transmitted by Johannes Stephen van Calcar's woodcuts that had been made to illustrate the anatomists' work.

Although original like those of numerous other treatises dating from that era, the *Fabrica* illustrations represent the tormented body and alternate images loaded with fear and serene horror. Vesalius' skinned bodies, his *écorchés* (Fig. 25-26) and his skeletons are shown in dynamic attitudes and his partially dissected human bodies are depicted as if they were alive, not inert, nor lifeless. For some time Vesalius professed an anatomical practice and figuration in which dissection was not yet totally liberated from old models. Reduced to the state of body, Vesalius' *écorchés* continued to reveal the humanity of the living body's gestures. "As a result, the boundary between living and dead matter was significantly obscured"⁵⁷ and since he understood the human being (Man) as being a work of art, and God as an artist⁵⁸ where each part of the human body he examined needed to fit into the system as a whole.

⁵⁷ Devon L. Hodges, *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy*, id., 6.

⁵⁸ Charles Singer, *A Short History of Anatomy from the Greeks to Harvey. The Evolution of Anatomy*, id., 116.

As dissector and scientist Vesalius turned anatomy (understood as bi-dimensional knowledge) into a completely objective science, the basis of which was the macroscopic study of the human body and the interrelationship of its parts. In “The Involvement of Artists in Renaissance Science”⁵⁹ the author James Ackermann states that *De Humani Fabrica* was the first book about the body which revolutionized the teaching of science to university students, laypeople and artists since texts and images corresponded to each other. Doctor William Osler called it the greatest medical book ever written - from which modern medicine originated as he considered it as one of the greatest document of the Renaissance and the first great book of modern science.

The examination of the evolution of anatomy during the Modern Period also brings light to *Penetration*. Before the gradual change in the basic approach to scientific study and teaching which occurred during the Renaissance the term *anatomy* was applied to any topic under investigation.⁶⁰ From then onwards information would be arranged into categories or “bodies” of knowledge. The new interest that arose in the sixteenth century lead to the first systematic empirical study of gross anatomy (the description of the systems visible to the unaided eye.) In the modern period, the emphasis was on explaining the natural world through observation and experimentation. This new scientific method depended on a process, a way of thinking and research, by which scientists and doctors acquired new knowledge. Instead of explaining events and diseases

⁵⁹ James Ackermann, “The Involvement of Artists in Renaissance Science” in *Science and the Arts in the Renaissance*, John W. Shirley and David Hoeniger (Washington D.C.: The Folger Shakespear Library, 1985), 94-129.

⁶⁰ Mimi Cazort, “The Theater of the Body” in *The Ingenious Machine of Nature. Four Centuries of Art and Anatomy* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1996), 14.

by guesswork or the supernatural, scientists began to look for explanations in what they could see around them.

To a certain extent the cleansing of the body from any reference to nature - as the medical illustrations began to focus on organs: to elements, to a sum of fragments rather than to a totality - and to the human being it incarnated occurred in Western thinking between the time of Andreas Vesalius' treatise and René Descartes' writings: between the *Fabrica* and the *Discourse on Method*.⁶¹ As, Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau affirm "it took the genius of René Descartes to finally establish a new system of thought, the Cartesian philosophy, in which 'all science...' was to be '... a certain, evident knowledge'. In his quest for the absolute truth, Descartes established a new method of reasoning based upon intuition, analysis and deduction."⁶²

Jonathan Sawday's book *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*⁶³ sets out to trace the "culture of dissection" in early-modern Europe. Particularly interesting is his argument that the specific concerns of Cartesian dualism - that fragmentation of the self not only into a soul and a body, but also of the mind into a self that can observe itself thinking - were already "in the air" before Descartes came to formulate his own position.

⁶¹ David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, id., 58.

⁶² Christa Sommerer, and Laurent Mignonneau. "Introduction: Art and Science – a Model of a New Dynamic Interrelation" in Sommerer, Christa and Laurent Mignonneau eds. *Art@Science* (Wien: Springer-Verlag, 1998), 7.

⁶³ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned : Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

In his book Jonathan Sawday gives an interesting “Cartesian” reading of Rembrandt’s painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp* (1632). Sawday places Descartes in Amsterdam (by then becoming one of the major centers for anatomy in Northern Europe) during the early 1630s at exactly the same time as Rembrandt. Descartes was then in the middle of his own anatomical investigations, studying the works of Vesalius. It is thus entirely possible that the Cartesian notion of the body as a machine animated by the soul was inspired by the “culture of dissection” itself.

Descartes’ dualism can be understood as an extension of Vesalius’ dualism as both individuals manifested an anxiety toward the de-centered body and both understood the body as an accessory of the person that slid in the register of having and which was not separable from the human presence. In that instance, René Descartes’ philosophy can be understood as an echo of the anatomical act, which distinguishes the soul inside human being.

The invention of the body as an autonomous concept implied a mutation of the status of the human being. Modern “Man” was born: a human being removed from himself (under the omen of the ontological break between the body and man), separated from others and isolated from the cosmos (from now on the body does not plead for itself, detached from the rest of the universe, it finds an end in itself, it is not the echo of an humanized cosmos).⁶⁴ And the idea that the entrails contained the soul gradually gave way to what

⁶⁴André Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, id., 58.

author David Hillman refers to as a “technologizing” of the interior.⁶⁵ Le Breton argues a gradual move away from the location of the self within the body and toward a Cartesian or purely mechanistic understanding of the self to standardized corpus has happened.⁶⁶ The mechanist philosophers who reduced and sterilized the body’s divorce from “Man” extended the body’s de-symbolization which had been started by the Anatomists.⁶⁷ The human being appeared as an automaton moved by its soul and from then onwards the body would be considered as a group of tools that interact with each other: a well-arranged machinery understood as distinguished from others by its singularity.

A particular rationalization of the body and its attitudes was born in the course of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, which inscribed the natural relation of “Man” and his body in a dualism. Anatomical knowledge laid the body flat and the correspondence that had existed previously between the flesh of the human being and the flesh of the world was now broken.

To comprehend Messenger’s visualization of the human body a brief overview of the progression of anatomy and its technological advancements in contemporary history is also crucial. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, technology and a reconfiguration of disease concepts changed medical attitudes towards anatomy. As diseases became gradually more anatomical, names and concepts of diseases changed from being

⁶⁵ David Hillman, “Visceral Knowledge” in *The Body in Parts*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 84.

⁶⁶ David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, id., 59.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 69.

subjective symptoms to associated anatomical lesions. Medicine had to move in the same direction. Anatomy and dissection suddenly became not only interesting but also essential for medical training. Like the other branches of the biological sciences, anatomy was aided by the invention of the compound microscope, which allowed scientists to examine the cells, tissues, and fluids of the body and enabled a shift away from the identification and study of bodily structures visible to the naked eye to that of the microscopic kind.⁶⁸ With regard to *Penetration*, Henry Gray's model is of great relevance since the scientist's endeavour set the standard for contemporary medical textbooks from then onwards. Although *Penetration* might not be directly informed by Gray's work (since nowhere is this work mentioned by the artist) Messenger's organs are clearly a result of his undertaking. His major work entitled *Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical of the Human Body* (1918) resulted in a classification and representation of the human body that became the standard for medical textbooks: an explanation of the human anatomy piece by piece, cell by cell, and function by function.⁶⁹ Although Messenger's work refers to modern anatomical representations her interest is not in explaining how the body functions by using the standard model of the organs. Rather, her straight forward treatment of the model is carried out to question the contemporary body and embodiment.

Several other technological discoveries have had an impact on the development of anatomy as well as on the understanding of the functioning of the human body. For

⁶⁸ Anton Van Leeuwenhoek, a Dutch clockmaker, invented one of the earliest microscopes at the end of the seventeenth century when he ground glass into a magnifying lens.

⁶⁹ A legend in his own time. Gray's *Anatomy* is still considered today the most popular book in the history of medicine. Since its first publication the book has had several authors and has evolved into the current thirty-seventh edition in Great Britain.

instance, the discovery of the x-rays by the German physicist Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen enabled anatomists to study tissues and organ systems in living animals and for the first time, doctors were able to view the insides of the body without having to perform surgery⁷⁰ (Fig. 27). Radiological advances in the twentieth century allowed scientists to make remarkable connections between anatomy and physiology, and researchers began integrating the study of anatomy with other disciplines, including biochemistry, genetics, and biophysics. The advancement of medical imaging started with the digitalization and computerization of traditional x-ray techniques, and today physicians have access to advanced technology such as Computed Axial Tomography (CAT) and Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scanners, and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), all of which go far beyond microscopy and x-rays.

New technologies and sophisticated science have meant new forms of visualization, which have induced the anatomical body to be now visually permeable as never before. Recent developments generated a body which is turned inside out, there seems to be no boundaries, no limits and apparently no loss to vision - this point will be developed thoroughly in the next chapter. Other advances in modern technology, and in particular, miniaturization, have also revolutionized the study of anatomy and surgery.

⁷⁰ The first x-ray photograph, taken in 1896, was of a human hand. Roentgen discovered that x-rays (electro-magnetic radiation) could penetrate solid substances and be recorded onto photographic plates in the same way as light. He published his findings in December of 1895, and by the next year, x-ray machines were being installed in hospitals. X-ray machines became immediately popular and were essential tools for surgeons operating on wounded soldiers during the First World War. Portable machines were taken into the battlefield and were used to locate bullets and shrapnel from exploded bombs.

Consequently, new medical imaging technologies produce exceptional representations of the body, which are, according to the lecturer in New Technologies of Communication Sarah Kember, often extraordinarily aesthetic.⁷¹ Representations that had formerly been fragmented by the visual codes of representation are, nowadays, whole in an analogical relationship with space. What I mean here is that whether it was made with traditional anatomical illustrations such as engraving, with photographic technologies (like the x-ray), with microscopic anatomy or with any other techniques, until the introduction of contemporary medical imagery the body was always studied as “detached” from its owner. Upon closer examination, however, we can identify that although the body is anatomized “live” and functioning because the process of imaging has replaced the practice of dissection, the technological image only “appears” to make the body whole. What is actually present today is a false sense of *complétude* (of completeness). Although the image of the body exists in the same space and time as the “real” body, the human being - the one represented on the screen - is once again lost inside/outside the image. Subsequently, the body is understood as autonomous from the human being it belongs to and understood as being a living appendage of the machine - the body having the person that it incarnates as a necessary and inconvenient residue. As a result, in *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, David Le Breton, professor at the Université de Strasbourg, asserts that, this incorporation of the body with the machine has stumbled against the excess that it had been constrained to neglect and to overthrow: “Man.”⁷²

⁷¹ Sarah Kember, *Virtual Anxiety. Photography, New Technologies and Subjectivity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998)

⁷² David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, id., 79.

The body examined in *Penetration*, studied in light of the history of anatomy assumes and imposes a specific view, located in particular knowledges of the thing (body) seen. Like anatomy, the body in the installation announces the creation of a new order of experimentation. *Penetration* creates a space of inquiry about the body as well as about the self. In the work the artist shows a strong interest in the role of embodiment. By addressing the body's natural functions and confounding our understanding of inside and outside, Messenger's installation piece has helped redirect the attention beyond the body's external appearances towards more visceral concerns. As such, her art subjects the body and its biological processes to incredible scrutiny with the intention of creating a sensorial experience while concurrently fostering introspection - her own and the viewer's/participant's.

3) *Penetration* inside Annette Messenger's Oeuvre

Several questions come to mind when examining *Penetration* in light of anatomy: how did Messenger arrive at creating *Penetration* and why did the artist revisit anatomy to question the body and embodiment?

Messenger's first exploration of the human body resulted in her mapping its exterior. Working with drawing and photography the artist produced works that dealt with the surface of the human form. The training Messenger received at the *École nationale des arts décoratifs* (1962-1966) resulted in marginal and elaborate creations. In her earliest

ventures she appropriated things and activities that had been devalued and which she invested with supreme value. She inventoried the most anodyne private practices that she cast into the public sphere, and translated childhood games into the adult world. In various cycles of illustrations such as *Annette, a Practical Woman* (Annette, femme pratique, 1974) as well as the notebooks from *Annette Messenger, Trickster* (1975) Messenger used her own body as if it belonged to no-one in particular and treated it as an object on which to perform diverse forms of hybridation and inversion. “Rectified” or “assisted” - in accordance with ideas introduced by Marcel Duchamp - the body was reduced to the status of an *objet trouvé*, an artefact. Unlike other women artists the female body in Messenger’s work was neither a field of conquest nor an instrument of transgression: it was just another cliché.

One cycle of drawings, found inside the notebook entitled *The Woman and...* (1975) (Fig. 28) is interesting for the understanding of *Penetration* as it simulates the transparency of the body through which the internal elements (digestive track, skeleton, foetus, etc.) are visible. Messenger worked on the surface of her own skin, drawing onto it the elements found under the skin. The incision into the body had not yet been made but already her concern with internality became evident. It would only be in the 1990s, with *Penetration*, that the venture inside the body would become “real.” Before then (in the 1980s) Messenger manipulated photography in order to tackle the theme of corporeality. Her practice related to a specific methodology: she framed, classified, arranged and composed entities/bodies that did not exist or were in the process of

existing. She split up faces and bodies in a surprising manner and her photographic fragments did not epitomize one rigid or critical viewpoint; rather she attempted a re-construction in which each carnal detail became a clue and revealed unsuspected insights. Her photographic works started to include a signature motif - the 'superimposition' of small black-and-white pictures framed under glass - which illustrated her 'specific' contemporary artistic practice. Her use of these photographs, displayed all sorts of body parts (feet, hands, nose, mouth, eyes, genitalia etc.) male and female, in different sizes (small and large) and in different perspectives (eroticized and disdained.) It entailed a correspondence between the pieces, as the works mirrored, reflected and informed one another without creating a visual totality. However, each work was autonomous and different from the next. Every work which introduced the main feature was composed of an individual frame drawn over with figures, symbols and decorative marks: fragments of bodies that are estranged and transformed through drastic changes in scale (*My Trophies*, *Mes trophées*, 1986-88); photographs connected with strings of words written in pencil on the walls (*My Works*, *Mes ouvrages*, 1987-92; *The Lines of the Hand*, *Les lignes de la main*, 1988-1991) (Fig. 30); images of body parts presented in clusters hanging from strings (*My Vows*, *Mes vœux*, 1988-91); and frames on the end of pikes (*The Pikes*, *Les piques*, 1991-1993) (Fig.31).

For Annette Messenger, the photographic process revealed new realities and allowed for new representations. Through photography, Annette Messenger indicated her uneasiness with the idea of totality. From being 'out there,' the world and the body came to be 'inside' photographs and from being whole, the body was now being fragmented.

Theorist Walter Benjamin once compared the camera to the surgeon's knife since the camera operated similarly on the human body by seeing it in fragments, and accordingly was able to penetrate more deeply into its true existence and reality. Consequently, photography allowed for an incision onto the body. But Messenger's desire to represent the body lead her to go deeper in the body and to map its inside (a place where she had never been before.) In science, the practice to cut into the body is anatomy and dissection. Accordingly, Messenger turned to the tradition of dissection in order to move and penetrate inside the body and particularly to the tradition of illustration since the anatomists were the first to give the interior an image.

Annette Messenger's Road Map (La Feuille de Route d'Annette Messenger, 1994) (Fig. 32) is a unique work inside the artist's oeuvre. The drawing which represents the topography of the body and borders on a geographical map constitutes a symbolic transposition where Messenger identifies the labyrinth of the body with the twist and turns of the state of nature. As such *Annette Messenger's Road Map* memorizes the body and should be read as one of the artist's first ventures inside the body. By representing the physical and natural features of the human body and their structural relationship, Messenger charts the body's interior in a way that allows the viewer to move from one organ to another in a circulatory mode that evokes the representation of blood circulating through the body.

The *Zodiac Man*⁷³ (Fig.33) was used, in the Middle-Ages, to explain the relationship between the body and the external world and to indicate the promising times and the locations to treat and the *Wound Man*⁷⁴ (Fig. 34) was another standard figure in medical illustration of the Renaissance.⁷⁵ I contend that as both past models Messenger's map is a model for the contemporary inquiry into the body. *The Road Map* is similar to what a sketch is for a painting and it sets the tone for Messenger's upcoming developments and following works. Where, in this drawing, the viewer follows - visually - the pathways set by the artist, with *Penetration* he or she will "make" the work and the "body" as he or she will wander inside it and set it in motion. What Messenger offers with the installation is a situation where the audience can interact with the objects, constructing their own body and thereby challenging the impenetrable authority of the representation.

Messenger's attraction to the body's interior as well as its fragmentation and depiction can also be traced back to the artist's religious, or rather, non-religious roots. The artist was born and raised in the northern Catholic town of Berck-sur-Plage (France) after the Second World War. The Church "served for the youthful Annette both as a personal refuge and as a place in and from which she could rebel against her atheist parents - were havens of hope and succour, as well as places of fear and death, spaces where gazing at

⁷³ Diane A Karp, *Ars Medica. Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*, id., 153.

"The *Zodiac Man* incorporated notions of the localized power of astrological signs over anatomy and disease" and "was consulted as a guide for other purgation treatments, as an aid to dietary recommendations and proscriptions, and as a tool for predicting the patient's future, sometimes even the probable mode of death."

⁷⁴ Johannes de Ketham's *Fasciculus Medicinae* (circa 1491) is a prime example in which those images can be found. Despite its apparent artistic and intellectual conservatism, this treatise relied on one important advance: printing and thus it could be said to indicate an emblematic beginning of the anatomical Renaissance.

⁷⁵ Diane A. Karp, *Ars Medica. Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*, id., 155.

the forms, colors, and objects that filled them, she might have sensed a supernatural presence.”⁷⁶ The church and its religious artefacts influenced the artist such that votive offerings and objects of popular devotion resurface in many of her projects. For instance in *The Cross* (La Croix, 1993) (Fig. 35)⁷⁷ Messenger arranged a variety of internal body organs - similar to the ones found in *Penetration* - onto a wooden cross. The body represented is turned inside-out and offered on display in fragments. Although fragmented in pieces, the arrangement of the pieces should be read as a conceptualization of the human body. However, unlike the hanging arrangement of *Penetration* which resembles a womb, the composition recalls representations of Christ’s body: of Christ’s Crucifixion. In that respect, the work can be understood as challenging the Christian belief that cutting the body into pieces would infringe on human integrity and compromise the human being’s chances of resurrection. In other words, *The Cross* can be said to demonstrate the point at which science and religion collide.

The tension between art and religion is a long-standing concern and relating to the subject of anatomy it is quite relevant. As explained earlier, the dissection of human cadavers was controversial from ancient times onwards and was a topic burdened with controversy and popular superstition. Prohibited by both ancient Greek and Roman religions, the restriction continued during the Middle-Ages, where dissections were forbidden and even considered unthinkable. The incision of the tool inside the body would have been regarded as a violation of the human being, fruit of the divine creation and would have

⁷⁶ Catherine Grenier, *Annette Messenger* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 42.

⁷⁷ Annette Messenger, *La Croix*, wood, material, string, 200x80cm, 1993.

been perceived as a profanity of both “the skin and the flesh of the world.” Since the body was not detachable from man or from the man: the body was man and it was the cosmos. Because the Christian doctrine promised the resurrection of the body (*corpus*), which many thought to be impossible if a body were anatomized, in 1163, *The Council of Tours* led to the Church’s formulation of a prohibition against human dissections. It was hoped the prohibition would limit the practice of dismembering and boiling the remains of crusaders killed in battle before their shipment home. As a result, post-mortem examinations were rare in the Middle-Ages, in part due to religious and intellectual scruples and although legal dissections were ritualized and infrequent - once or twice a year and in some places once every five years - when they did take place their impact on society was considerable⁷⁸ since those events encouraged a change in public opinion and helped develop medical understanding of the body.

Inside Messenger’s oeuvre the evolution from surface to depth took place around questions of shape. Then again, this move also took place within the inquiry itself. Where photography showed the surface of the body, drawing and installation art allowed for a representation of the inside and drove the interrogation about the body to new depths. Where anatomy enabled documentation and fixed the standard for human measurement, dissection allowed for the body and the organs to be seen and understood in new ways.

⁷⁸ Although human dissection was prohibited, as early as 1235, some physicians at Salerno’s medical school defied the Church’s authority and broke with the tradition. The rise of secular universities also contributed to the increase of dissection.

4) From Bi- to Tri-Dimensionality

In her monograph on Annette Messenger, the art critic, Catherine Grenier describes *Penetration* in a section of the book entitled “Body and Décor.”⁷⁹ The term she coins to qualify the piece is “sculpture/installation”⁸⁰ since the work occupies the entire exhibition space. Grenier asserts that, where in the past, the artist’s interest had been with the surface of the body “her more recent ventures make both work and exhibition into a single, gigantic organism that communicates with the world through a kind of osmosis as the visitors come and go.”⁸¹

Although “*Anonymes* (1993) was the first piece done by Messenger where the viewer was expected to enter physically, requiring the participation of their whole body,”⁸²

Penetration is the first work envisioned as a “penetrable.” *Anonymes* (Fig. 36-37) was composed of poles - mounted by stuffed animals which had their heads covered with plush toys - planted in earth and scattered inside the gallery space. The installation was organized so the viewer would make his or her way inside the composition and wander between the pikes inside a dim lit room. However, where *Anonymes* was fixed and organized from floor to ceiling *Penetration* was set from ceiling to floor, organized

⁷⁹ Catherine Grenier, *Annette Messenger*, id., 145-167.

⁸⁰ Term used for a later exhibition entitled *Dépendance- Indépendance* held at the Gagosian Gallery, New York city, in 1997.

⁸¹ Catherine Grenier, *Annette Messenger*, id., 149.

⁸² Ibid., 145.

vertically downwards and arranged so that the elements could be set in motion - this point will be discussed at length in “Touching the Parts.”

With her title (*Penetration*) Messenger makes a forthright reference to an installation piece created in the 1960s. For his Paris exhibition at the *Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris* in 1969, Jesús Rafael Soto transformed the whole courtyard outside the Museum into the *Penetrable*. Thousands of plastic threads were openly hung down in the space, thickening it into a dense medium. The work could be entered from any direction and the threads were occasionally affected as a group, by the viewer and by the wind. Following Soto's model⁸³, Messenger's arrangement hangs from above - in her case from the ceiling - and deploys vertically from top to bottom. Remaining faithful to the former model - as Messenger's organs are suspended side by side and related to the site they are mounted in - the artist created an installation which could be entered from any direction and where the viewers could stand inside it, cross back and forth, and for the first time, touch its parts with their bodies. As such the arrangement became an enveloping experience, and, in a significant sense - when it was penetrated by a number of viewers - a “communal” experience.

With her anatomical arrangement Messenger moved past the mapping and documentation of the human body to create a three-dimensional composition which made the viewer aware of the kind of experience that visiting the body entailed. By autopsying the human body (which she represented as a series and succession of parts and shapes repeated in a

⁸³ Soto's work will be discussed thoroughly in “*Penetration* and the History of Spectatorship in Visual art” (Chapter 3).

random way) Messenger used anatomy as a legitimate means to advance new ways of exploring and understanding the body.

Inside *Penetration* the body can't exist without the space it is presented in: the body becomes the space and the space situates it. Of the body that has been opened up the organs that are displayed for everyone to see are the only reminders of a "proper" body that used to be. The diagrammatic quality, found in Annette Messenger's piece, provides a compelling visual extravagance that does not entirely connects with the reality of the body's internal functions - as casually coloured organs hang in clusters and shapes are repeated in a random way.

What Annette Messenger has accomplished with *Penetration* is to render the interior public. The blurring from private to public ritual is one that has been present in the history of anatomy since its beginning. Until the nineteenth century, dissections were usually public, and organized as teaching events. Since the corpses were usually those of hanged criminals, there was an unspoken religious and moral association between dissection and punishment. "The anti-hero would be hung for murder and then would suffer the supreme indignity of public dissection rather than Christian burial."⁸⁴ Hanging the body was thus a common practice and the subsistence of ropes - in the anatomical atlases - around the neck of cadavers or supporting some *écorché* were just a reminder "of the hanging which has brought about this cruel end"⁸⁵ (Fig. 38-39). Artists who used

⁸⁴ Deanna Petherbridge, "Art and Anatomy: the Meeting of the Text and Image," id., 38.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 38.

living models also used ropes and pulleys to support in tiring or difficult poses⁸⁶. Today this practice is no longer in existence, however because of Messenger's academic training, it seems accurate to say she must have been familiar with this method. We should also keep in mind that in *Penetration*, the body organs are hung from the ceiling by angora strings.

When looking at the installation the hanging organs can also remind one of marionettes: the figures whose movements are controlled by another through, strings, rods, or hand movements. Although the organs are not "operated" like puppets worked by strings, the analogy of the artist as puppet master is tempting as Annette Messenger does create a theatrical space and/or rather a space of play. Entering Annette Messenger's *Penetration* is like experiencing a grouping of internal human body parts hanging in mid-air and suspended on display. *Penetration's* body is not literally operated like marionettes/puppets but it is set in a décor and it is part of a "play" where the actors perform without a script.⁸⁷

In addition, the suspended organs remind us of hanging meat found in meat markets and/or displayed in butchers' shops. To start, the association of the body's insides with meat hanging from hooks is visual. Once this correlation made, the composition can be read as crystallizing thoughts of consumption, where *Penetration* deals in part with lack and/or excess. Viscera is what Messenger represents and displays. Like "pieces of choice"

⁸⁶ Ibid, 38.

⁸⁷ Annette Messenger's involvement with the theater is central as she has designed sets and décors on several occasions.

hung in stores, Messenger exposes certain selected parts of the body. As she had done it in her drawings and photographs (where she fragmented the body's surface) with *Penetration* Messenger fragments the inside of the body and only chooses to display certain parts: like the digestive, urinary and reproductive systems, the heart, the brain... in other words, the functional parts of the human body.

Another element of the work which refers to the theme of life and death is that Messenger's art practice revolves around the act of collecting. Since the practice of collecting means to gather and accumulate in a place - forever pushing back the frontiers of completeness - it is subsequently a way to stop time. Messenger believes that even when a collection grows it does not age but rather "becomes more beautiful."⁸⁸ Because a collection is endless "collecting is reassuring, limitless - until death comes along, just as an object reused and reproduced."⁸⁹ With *Penetration*, Messenger does not however repeat images as she had in her photographic works, but she accumulates objects - realistic replicas of the internal body - and creates intimate arrangements which vary according to the space in which they are shown. Because she modifies her compositions from exhibition to exhibition, and fuses elements from various series and/or reworks the whole according to her outlook, they progress and transform in time. Transformation and transience become crucial elements of the work. The theme of life and death is

⁸⁸ Annette Messenger in Catherine Lawless, « Entretien avec Annette Messenger » *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art Moderne*, no. 27, (Printemps 1989), 111.

⁸⁹ Robert Storr, Interview with Annette Messenger in *Annette Messenger, Faire Parade 1971-1995* (Paris: Musées, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 23 Mars- 21 Mai 1995).

experienced in *Penetration* at various levels and consequently the work relates directly to anatomy and dissection.

As aforementioned Annette Messenger's reference to past traditions is manifest: her citation of the practice of public dissections as well as live model drawing (of the past) is clear. However, through her appropriation of the diagrammatic style and medical language and by showing her work to a non-medical audience in art galleries Messenger blurs the frontier between science and art and challenges the medical establishment as well as the Museum Institution. Messenger's composition disturbs. Although it is represented in a playful mode, the body in *Penetration* still displays everyone's internal fears since it evokes life only to point out its absence. Because the organs are isolated from their life force - the one which allows them to live - they have become obsolete and consequently they can be pronounced "dead."

With *Penetration* Messenger creates spatial and perceptual discontinuities that convey a loss of unity, a lack of focus and a lack of center where she manipulates and transforms the human body in order to comment on and illustrate the power and magic of being human and of being "alive." By way of representing "dead" organs and confronting them with the participants Messenger raises issues of identity and embodiment. Here again, Messenger constructs an atmosphere in which the viewer's sensation of space is determined by the particular environment in which the artwork is set. By fragmenting the human body in pieces and by enveloping the viewer inside the composition, Messenger explores the body - the two bodies: the constructed body and the performer's body - as an

element in space: both metaphorically and theoretically. *Penetration* shows a restructured “body” while simultaneously changing the viewer’s perception of his or her own physical space as it imposes an uncomfortable and self-conscious state on the audience in an attempt to reduce the gap between audience-performer (participant). And it is as such that Messenger brings forth concerns surrounding the mystery of the body and embodiment. And it is the paradoxical conjunction of affirmation and denial - of life and death - which may perhaps disturb the viewer.

As is the case in the theoretical representation of anatomy, in *Penetration* the dead body becomes the measure of the living being. Separated from the body the foetus has an identity of its own, yet it is also reduced to the level of a detachable organ, where it is configured as no more than a body part. Unrelated to the site of its growth the foetus gains a separate identity by being disembodied. In trying to reduce the body to an organism, a sum of detachable parts, *Penetration* implies that the body is but that. As paradoxical as it may seem, in order to visually interpret the connections between life, the universe, and the human body as a backdrop for understanding the complexities of human life, Annette Messenger requires a body in pieces as the basic matter and/or as its text to be decoded. Inspired by her interest in how the body functions she sets out to maintain the integrity and completion of the human body yet the body as recreated is subversive, it is exploited and its parts seem out of touch.

But far from being macabre, the separate elements and the colors used by the artist suggest medical illustrations. Since 1858, Gray’s *Anatomy* has served to legitimize

notions of “serious” science unchallenged by the frivolity of art and set the standard for medical images. But in recent years, new medical technologies have become a source of inspiration for artists. In an era and society, where medical imagery offers numerous instruments to provide direct knowledge of the body’s interior without “invasive” procedure and where we have knowledge “of our depths only by way of planar images,”⁹⁰ the artist has chosen a conventional way to represent the body. At the same time, Messenger’s “anatomy” challenges the medical and artistic consensus, and confronts the spectator/participant.

Penetration provides a compelling visual extravagance. The organs represented are larger than life and the relations of scale are reversed. Also the work deals with questions of combination: the body is hermaphrodite, as both male and female body organs are represented simultaneously inside the work. Accordingly, the work remains a distinctly visual and cerebral experience: a conceptualization of the body rather than the body itself, a view of ourselves that we know not from any real familiarity but from visual diagrams that have been derived from scientific research and consensus. Incomplete, shaped out of materials (kapok and cloth), and dematerialized by the viewer because of his or her positioning as well as his or her manifestation, the whole body becomes a concept rather than a palpable object complete in itself. Because offering everything for display or show (representing the non-representable i.e. the open body) means the production of an image that displaces the boundaries of space (inside/outside of the body) and time rather than the body itself, I contend that *Penetration* is a conceptualization of the body.

⁹⁰ Philippe Comar, *Images of the Body* (New York: N. Abrams, [1993] 1999), 91.

As clarified previously *Penetration* is Messenger's first walk-through piece in which the viewer penetrates the work both visually and physically and experiences it from within and without. The space suggested is different from anything the artist had done previously. Walking into, through and around this environment one discovers Messenger's acute feel for compositional strategies. Like it had never been done before by the artist, the work stands ready to interact with visitors who choose to enter, cross through it and wander inside it. Inside *Penetration* space and body are closely tied. By advancing from surface to depth, from bi-dimensionality to tri-dimensionality, and from horizontality to verticality Messenger thrusts the viewer inside the "unknown" since the body represented inside *Penetration* is understood from within and articulated as being fragmented, dissociated and in transition.

In his essay "By way of Body"⁹¹ the philosopher Edward Scott Casey redefines space by means of the body. Using Kant, Whitehead, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies Casey demonstrates a new and particular way into place via the body. There is no getting around that between body and place there is a special connection. One has no relationship with three-dimension unless one experiences, that is, unless one's state is receptive to the perception of such planes with one's own body. Casey asserts that "the body is the pivot around which the three dimensions of spatial extension arrange themselves and from which they ultimately proceed."⁹² He goes on to affirm that "more than any other single factor, witness is responsible for the body's unique contribution to our experience of the

⁹¹ Edward Scott Casey, "By Way of Body" in *The Fate of Place: A philosophical History* (Berkeley University of California, 1997), 202-242

⁹² Edward Scott Casey, "By Way of Body," id., 208.

world in general and of places in particular.”⁹³ Just as one is always with a body - being bodily - one is always within a place as well. To be absolutely here means that with my body I am in this place. Consequently, to be - i.e. to be sensible - is to be in place since the body moves through space. In addition, in the chapter entitled “By Way of the Body,” Casey clarifies Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory about the body. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty reconsiders the lived body. According to him every activity of the body is closely attuned with its circumambient world. What Merleau-Ponty teaches us is that the human body is never without a place or that place is never without a body. He also demonstrates that the lived body is itself a place since its very movement constitutes place and brings it into being. In addition, he assists us in our realization that space is different from place to place and from body to body. In Casey’s words “for my flesh is finely meshed with the world’s flesh - and thus with the places presented and sedimented within the world: a place-world in which I can live and move and have my being.”⁹⁴ For Casey the body becomes a crucial clue for the understanding of place. Casey’s and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of space can support and enhance the understanding and reading of *Penetration* as the viewer’s body becomes a crucial element of Messenger’s work.

In his conclusion Casey states that “just as a place is animated by lived bodies that are in it, a lived place animates these same bodies as they become emplaced there.”⁹⁵ I believe that this statement can literally be transformed and adapted to Messenger’s work in such a

⁹³ Ibid., 214.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 238.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 242.

way: just as *Penetration* is animated by the viewers' - lived - bodies that are in it, *Penetration* animates these same bodies as they become emplaced within it. Messenger's work has gained in volume to become a place to be entered and experienced. By entering the installation, by going inside, the viewer creates his or her own environment as well as his or her own relationship to his or her own body. Although space is created by the objects in suspension, in *Penetration* it is simultaneously created by the viewer-participant.

Annette Messenger's work exemplifies a complex set of negotiations between body and space: negotiations between the actual domain of the real body of the viewer and the three-dimensional (virtual) domain of the represented body and represented spaces. Together the performative body and the spectator's participatory body constitute the notion of a body, which is increasingly being immersed in the dialectics of mediated experience. Successfully, it is the performative and interactive body (the sensual body that constitutes our very being) that counterbalances Messenger's disavowal of the mortal obsolete body (that which sentences us to non-being).

Messenger designed the composition so viewers would walk through the pieces and brush up against them. Inside the closely packed space, every object is separated from the other and all the components hang close together without meeting in such a way that the viewer who ventures inside the composition may touch the parts, "bump into things"⁹⁶ and thus physically experience the human geography. Where the spectator had been suspended

⁹⁶ *Penetration. A survey of recent sculptures and installations with a conversation between Annette Messenger and Jean-Louis Froment.* (New York, Gargosian Gallery, 1997)

between the skin of the film and the skin of the developed photograph onto which the body's surface was shown - in previous works such as *My Works* (Mes Ouvrages, 1987-1988) and *My Vows* (Mes Voeux, 1988-onward) for instance - he or she is now encouraged to enter into unfamiliar territory. Interestingly, as the skin was closely akin to the artist's medium of choice of the time - photography - the viscera is closely tied to her contemporary choice: installation art, which allows the viewer to become active inside the composition and to participate in the work's/body's realization.

Messenger's *Penetration* breaks free from any bi-dimensional and/or "truthful" representations of the body. Expanding on anatomical illustration by introducing notions of space and time and thus introducing the viewer as a central component of the work Messenger gives the installation piece another "dimension" - a term which can be understood in this context figuratively or not - as she allows the work to be physically penetrated. In addition, Messenger uses other artistic elements - which will be discussed in depth in the upcoming chapters: Installation art, incorporation of light, shadows and heat, etc. - which extend the work's three-dimensional quality and give it more depth: more "body."

At this point in the thesis, the link between *Penetration* and the history of anatomy and medical imagery is clear. We have established that accessing and reading the body is the subject of the work and that since the entry into the body is done by way of its interior, anatomy becomes the center of the composition.

Where many trends in anatomy and anatomical illustration have been mentioned and analysed, we can further recognize how the artist's citation of the specialized vocabulary (of anatomy) has set the work within a specific - medical - discourse as well as a definite era.



Plate 25.

Andreas Vesalius and Stephen van Calcar and the Workshop of Titian.

De Humani Corporis Fabrica

(1537-1543)

Cover, Title Page, Woodcut

Basel, 1543.

National Library of Medicine.

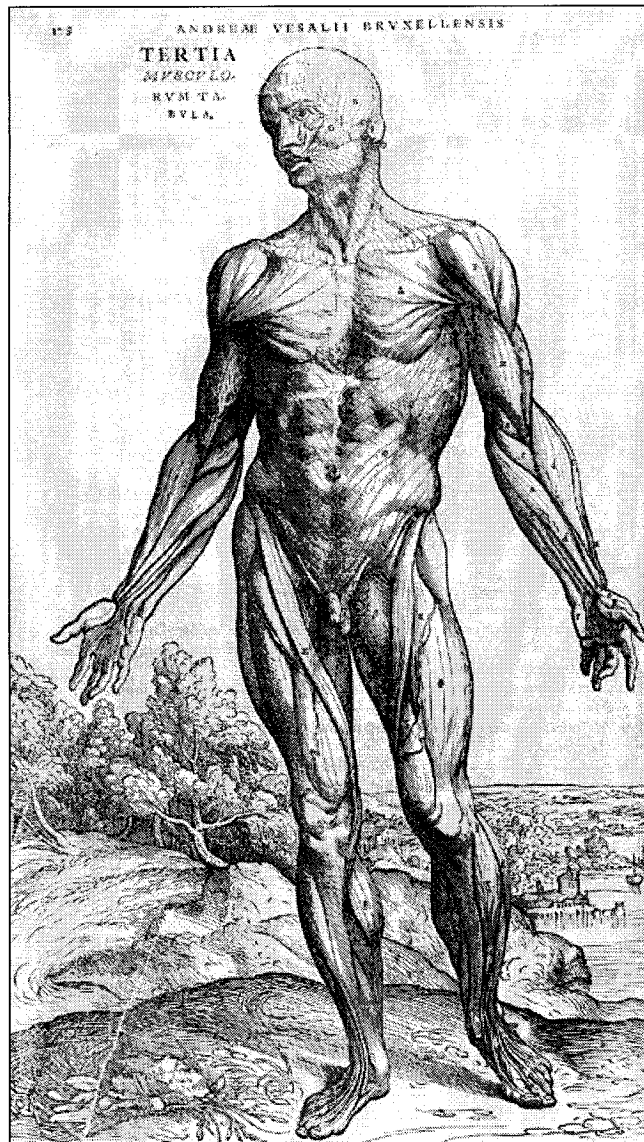


Plate 26.

Andreas Vesalius, Stephen van Calcar and the Workshop of Titian

De Humani Corporis Fabrica

First Illustration on the muscles, Woodcut.

Basel, 1543.

National Library of Medicine.

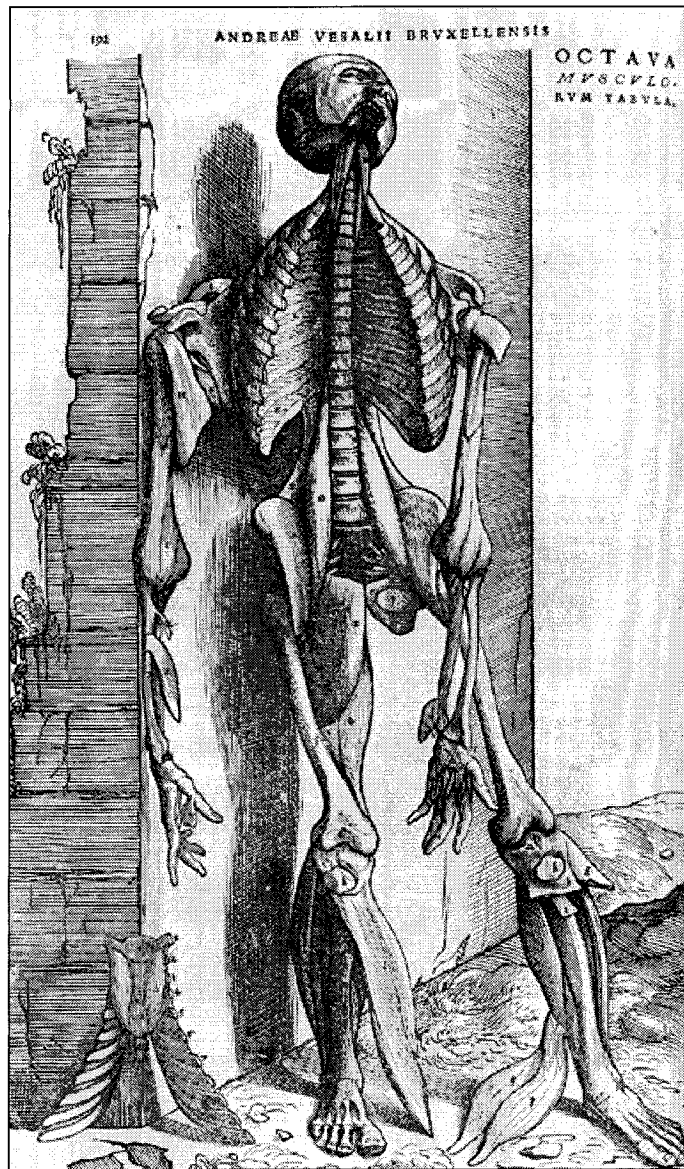


Plate 27.

Andreas Vesalius, Stephen van Calcar and the Workshop of Titian

De Humani Corporis Fabrica

Eighth Illustration on the muscles, Woodcut.

Basel, 1543.

National Library of Medicine.



Plate 28.

Wilhelm Roentgen

The Hand of Mrs. Roentgen, 1895

In Otto Glasser, *Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen and the early history of the Roentgen rays.*

London, 1933.

National Library of Medicine.

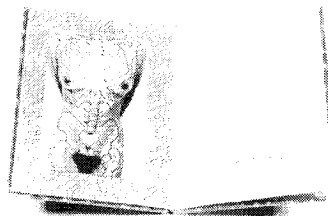
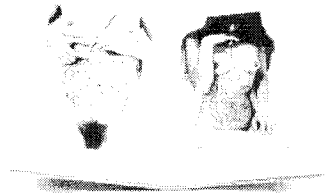
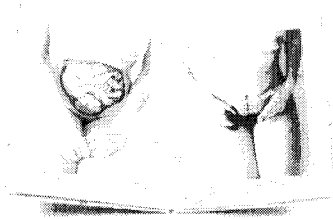


Plate 29.

Annette Messenger

Annette Messenger Trickster (Annette Messenger Truqueuse)

The Woman and... (La Femme et le ...)

1975



Plate 30.

Annette Messenger

The Lines of the Hand (Les Lignes de la Main).

1988

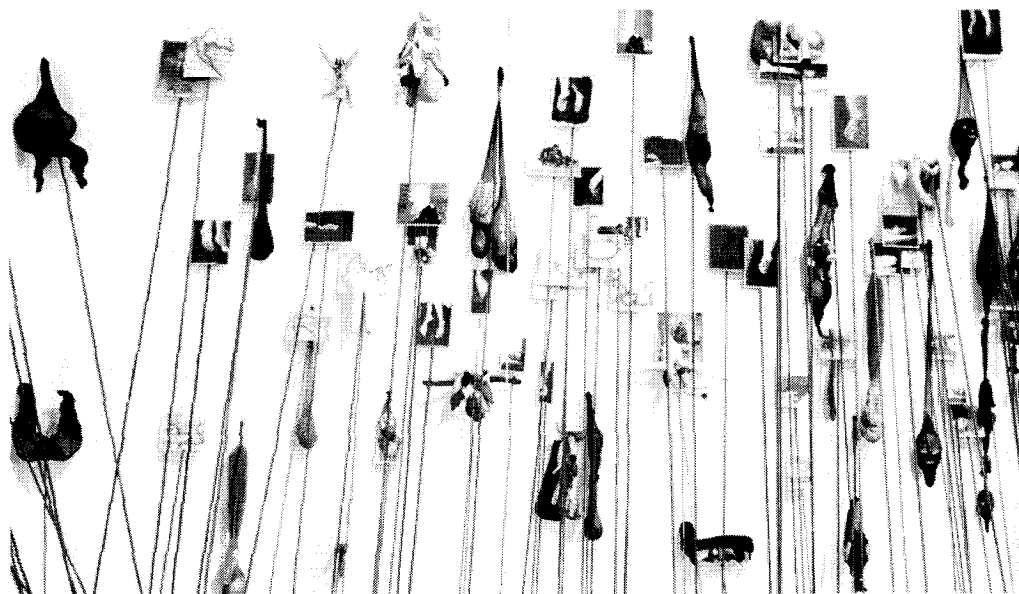


Plate 31.

Annette Messenger

The Pikes (Les Piques)

1991-1993

Plate 32.

Annette Messenger

Annette Messenger's Road Map (La Feuille de Route d'Annette Messenger)

1994

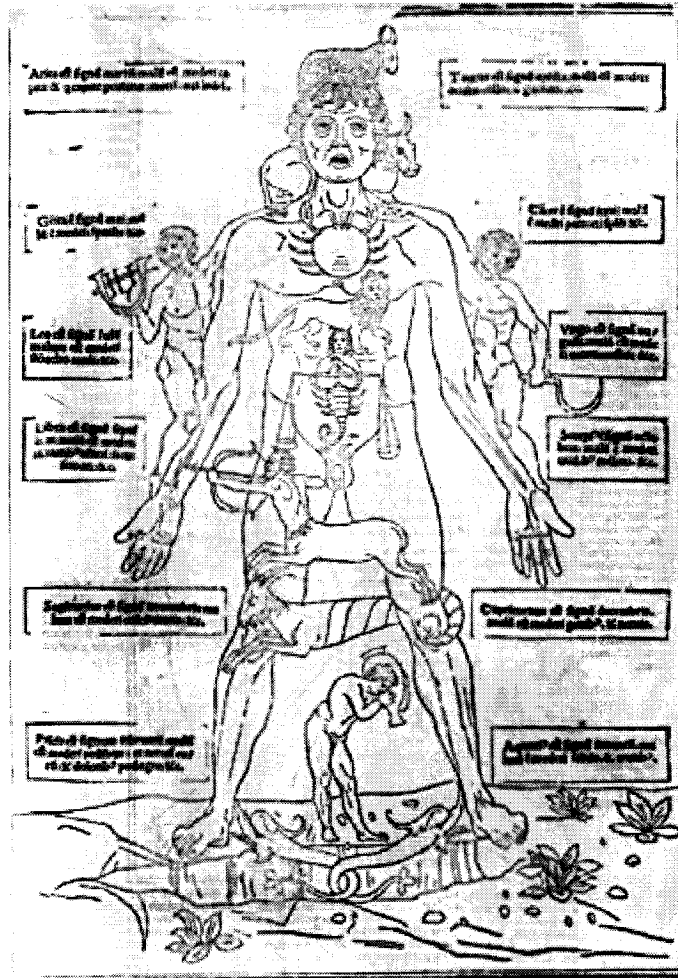


Plate 33.

Anonymous (Italian, Late Fifteenth Century)

Zodiac Man

1493

From Johannes de Ketham

Fascilius Medicinae

Venice : Cesarem Arrivabenum, 1522

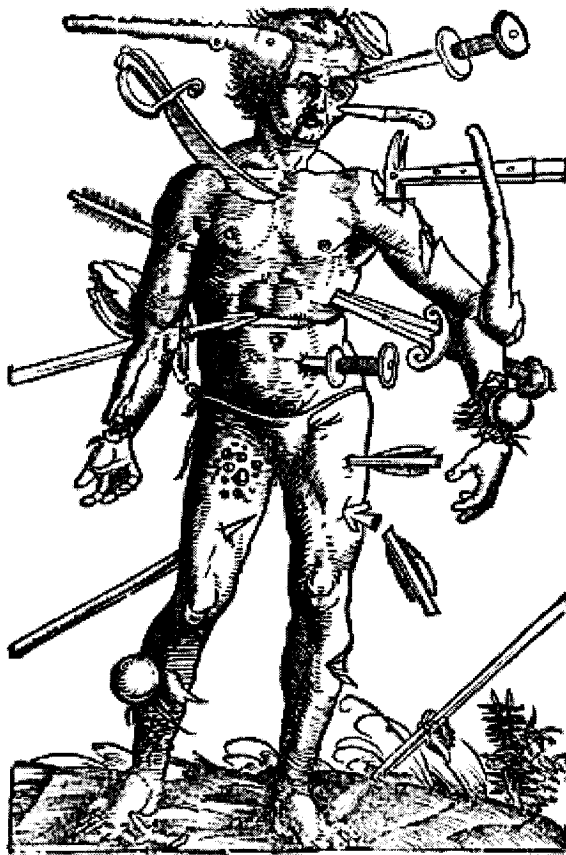


Plate 34.

Anonymous (German, Early Sixteenth Century)

Wound Manikin

1517

From Hans von Gersdorff

Feldtbuch der Wundartzney...

Strasbourg: Hans Shotten, 1540

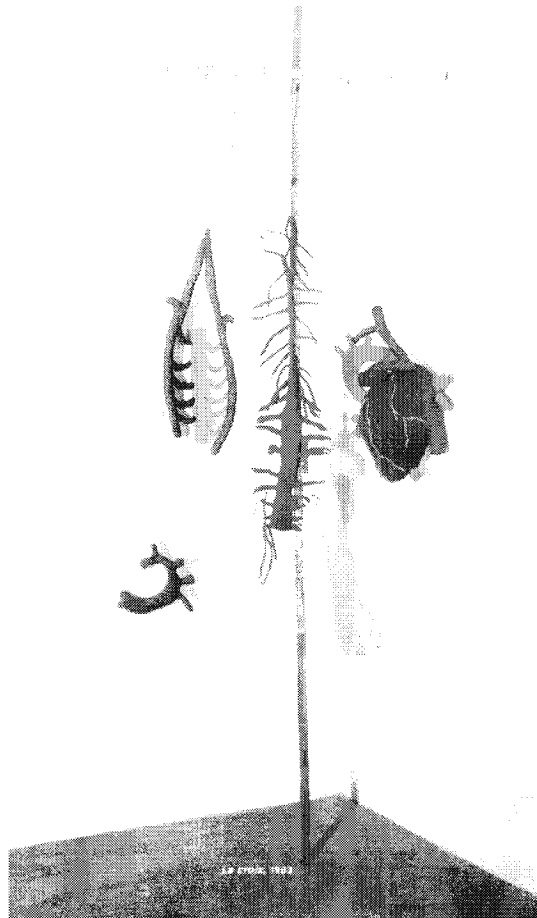


Plate 35.

Annette Messager
The Cross (La Croix)
1993



Plate 36.

Annette Messenger

Nameless Ones (Anonymes)

1993



Plate 37.

Annette Messenger

Nameles Ones (Anonymes)

Detail

1993

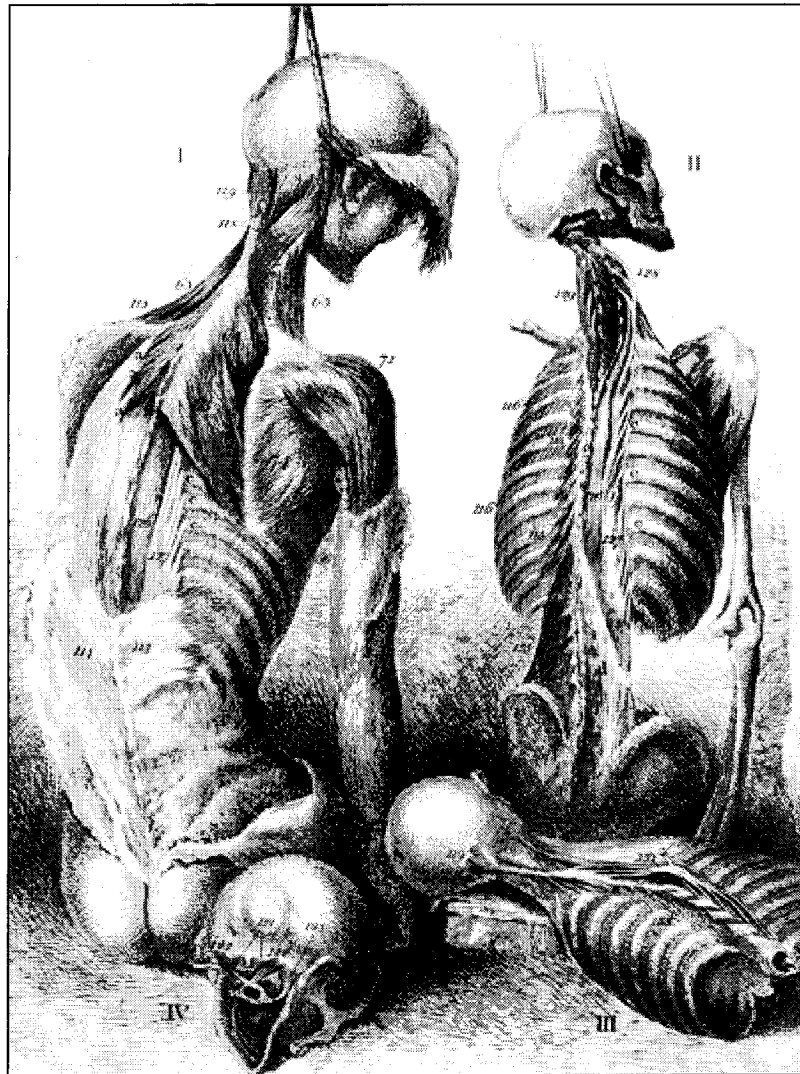


Plate 38.

John Bell

Engraving of the bones, muscles, and joints

Illustration of the first volume of the *Anatomy of the Human Body*, 2nd edition

Etching

London, 1804

National Library of Medicine



Plate 39.

Govard Bidloo

Gérard de Lairesse

Ontleding des menschelyke lichaams...

Copperplate engraving with etching

Amsterdam, 1690

National Library of Medicine

CHAPTER II.

From Contemporary Medical Vision to Viewer Participation

With *Penetration* Messenger brings science into the museum space in a way that questions medical representations as well as challenges the Museum institution. The very notion of the body, of its boundaries and its inner structure is being split open in an ever-regressing vision. The body Messenger represents is dissected, scrutinized, re-arranged and displayed in such a way that it can literally be examined from the inside. Because today's medical body is seen and experienced through technology, Messenger proposes a new way of thinking the human body based on a complete sensory experience.

The relationship between medicine and the visual arts has a long history. From ancient specula to modern advertisements, Renaissance flap anatomies to computerized scans of mental processes, prints to photographs, acupuncture charts to anatomical illustrations, bodies have been made spectacles, enhanced and miniaturized, dissected and mapped. Accordingly, art and medicine have worked together in the production of knowledge of our biological being to produce scientific representations of the body to develop a particular way of learning through techniques of visualization. In *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure*, the art historian Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that “the body

has been the principal subject of Western art since the Renaissance. At the same time, the body is the locus and metaphor for understanding and exploring political change, in the broadest sense..."⁹⁷ Medical data, like any type of information, whether numerical, linguistic, or visual is encased in some narrative and as such is never neutral. Consequently, every image originating from such data represents a history and a convention of picturing the body - living and/or dead. Subsequently, in developing a visual language of the human figure, all cultures reflect their underlying social agendas. In other words, no image of the body can be separated from the culture which produces it and as such the body can act as a device for reading and understanding that culture. The conventions that emerge through such representations - including what is taboo as well as what is sanctioned - usually give insight into the deeper ideological forces producing the image. Thus, the conventional representation of the body within particular cultures and sub-cultures should allow us insights into the processes of such groups. Accordingly, the visual representation of the body within the history of medicine empowers us to make interpretations of the ideology of medicine. Because medicine entails the management of the body and the body's sensations it can be understood why the contemporary artists who represent the body and/or embodiment and/or identity have taken interest in the medical field and particularly in its methods of representation and its systems of production of knowledge.

Medicine would not have progressed to the same degree without a long history of its knowledge being presented, regularized, and disseminated in visual forms. The

⁹⁷ Nicholas Mizroeff, *Bodyscape. Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 2.

relationship between medicine and its visual mechanisms is a history of ongoing tensions between the mind and the eye, the whole and the part, the evident surface and the penetrable depth. The development of contemporary science has been motivated by an ambition to perfect the mapping of the body.

Penetration allows for a reconsideration of the representation of the body from antiquity to contemporary art. The intersections between “technologies,” the body and image-making implicate the body in the work, the body in front of the work, as well as the work as body. Inside the work areas of inquiry include issues of identity, sexual difference, and sexual orientation incarnated in the attributes, attitudes and roles assigned to the body in representation in ways that inflect spatial relations with erotic connotations.

With *Penetration* Messenger investigates the rich history of observing and caring for the body, as it is understood in contemporary medical tradition. However, although Messenger implicates her art in the scientific inheritance, the artist is interested in locating or detecting the emotionality of this seemingly emotionless field. Thus, rather than dissociating feelings of loss, pain and fragility associated with disease, illness and aging - which technology distances us from Messenger recognizes the fragile relationship and connection between the body and the mind, the physical and the emotional which she attempts to bring us closer to with *Penetration*.

When examining *Penetration* (which clearly refers to past and contemporary representations of the body) it is essential to investigate the contemporary history of the

body as well as the contemporary tradition of medical imaging since both histories construct a way of looking at the body that allows for a specific type of reading. Medical images represent things a doctor cannot see without medical imaging equipment and bring an appearance of certitude into being. Ideally, they serve as a record of morphology and physiology. But like anatomical illustrations, microscope slides or diagnostic tools such as PET (Positron Emission Tomography) scans, do more than simply confirm the presence or absence of disease. We must however be cautious on the sole reliance on technology. In this time of rapid technologic changes, it is important that all processes, which influence diagnostic outcome be carefully examined.

Penetration gains autonomy from the contemporary framework of medical imagery while it simultaneously uses it in order to generate a new way of living and experiencing the body. First, Messenger appropriately and imaginatively considers medical imagery in the broader context of contemporary cultural analysis. Along these lines, *Penetration* calls attention to our own perspective and challenges us to imagine just how the visual culture of medicine looks to those outside its institutions (in time and place). Secondly, with its anatomically correct representations it promotes an impression of scientific precision as well as it allows for remarkable visualization. The installation demonstrates that in an era where medicine is technological it is not vital to use new technologies to represent the body's interior. Furthermore, as a result of not using technology to represent the interior, Messenger challenges knowledge and experience.

With *Penetration*, Annette Messenger reveals the complex interplay among conventions of art, social customs, and descriptive modes of depiction in producing a framework that amongst other things questions medical representation as well as the viewers' own identity. As Messenger produces a new kind of representation of the body *Penetration* raises the question: what does it mean to have a body today?

Finally, with her choice of medium - installation art - Annette Messenger parts from the contemporary way of representing the interior of the human body. Theatricality and the strongly performative nature inherent in this work show the merging of art and physical participation which allow Messenger to depart from the certainties and norms that have been accepted in art.

In this chapter, I will explain the artist's intention: why the artist has decided on such a method of representation in an era where medicine has become hi-tech and where the advantage of medical imaging is that it offers a representation of the body which provides spatially discrete information for interpretation. I will show how installation art - although considered quite conventional in today's artistic times - enables the artist to go beyond the contemporary constraints imposed by medical techniques of imaging in order to create a new aesthetical and theoretical model.

1) The Museums and Private Artistic Institutions

Numerous exhibition projects have encouraged a new way of looking at visual objects from the territories that are conventionally labelled “medicine” and “art.” As diverse as they are these exhibitions explore the new face of this ancient science and consequently place the anatomical body at the center of the contemporary artistic inquiry.

The recent international exhibitions I have chosen to review (which have been organized chronologically) concern the artists who have worked for the medical profession from the Renaissance onwards, sketching and modeling organs, limbs and bones for research and education. They are also about the artists who have been inspired and confronted by scientific research. Simultaneously, these exhibitions show the point at which medicine and art intersect as they bring together a significant range of objects from various medical and art museums and collections worldwide and as they present the body - alive or dead - as an object of wonder.

*Ars Medica: Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*⁹⁸ held at The Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1985 drew upon the history of art and the history of medicine with the aim of showing the shared concerns that both artists and physicians have had in sorting out the mysteries of the human body and observing the ills of human life. As Diane R. Karp affirmed in the catalogue introduction “...the exhibition serves as a compendium of works whose collective presence and juxtaposition afford a sense of man’s own understanding of the human condition in its myriad states of health and illness, from birth

⁹⁸ *Ars Medica: Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*. Exhibition presented at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, selected and organized by Diane R. Karp (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985)

to death, transmuted by each individual artist's particular grasp of technical and image skill.”⁹⁹

In 1995-1996, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre¹⁰⁰ showed *Rx: Taking Our Medicine*, an exhibition which interpreted the experience of patients in our contemporary health care system. Through their use of new media seven emerging and mid-career contemporary artists expressed concerns about medicine and health care as they explored the contemporary conditions of diagnosis and treatment as they sought to communicate the patient's experience.

Presented in 1997, *The Quick and the Dead: Artists and Anatomists*¹⁰¹ was a comparative exploration of historical medical art with the aim of revealing certain visual metaphors and common techniques that seem to occur again and again over the centuries. First published in conjunction with a touring exhibition of historical artwork organized by the Hayward Gallery of London and the Arts Council of Great Britain the exhibition catalogue sets to establish the link between the visual arts and the evolution of medicine since the fifteenth century. With “Art and Anatomy: The Meeting of Text and Image” author Deanna Petherbridge points out that, during the past five centuries, anatomists have used illustrations to study anatomy and to publish their discoveries. And Ludmilla

⁹⁹ Diane R. Karp. *Ars Medica. Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), x.

¹⁰⁰ *Rx: Taking Our Medicine*, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, 29 October 1995 -21 January 1996.

¹⁰¹ Deanna Petherbridge and Ludmilla Jordanova eds. *The Quick and the Dead. Artists and Anatomists*. Exhibition catalogue (University of California Press, 1997)

Jordanova's brief and thought-provoking social essay entitled "Happy Marriages and Dangerous Liaisons: Artists and Anatomy"¹⁰² ends the book with an attempt to establish a framework around the question, "What brings art and anatomy together?"

Shown at The Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow in 1999¹⁰³, *The Fine Art of Medicine* explored the fascinating relationship between art, medicine and public health using works of art. The exhibition aimed to show that the links between art and medicine, which were once so strong, continued to grow today. On display were the paintings, prints, books and sculptures of Masters such as Dürer, Rembrandt, Goya and van Gogh who had been inspired by themes of medical and artistic interest which were displayed alongside the works of local contemporary artists (including local contemporary artists like Bellany, Wiszniewski, McFadyen, Esson and Downie.)

The exhibition and book *Spectacular Bodies. The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now*¹⁰⁴, organized three years after *The Quick and the Dead* by the Hayward Gallery, show the human body in various states of disorder and the conflicting postures scientists and other spectators hold towards it. Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace connected five centuries of history, science, and art, presenting such topics as

¹⁰² Jordanova Ludmilla, "Happy Marriages and Dangerous Liaisons: Artists and Anatomy" in *The Quick and the Dead. Artists and Anatomists*, id., 100-113.

¹⁰³ *The Fine Art of Medicine*. The Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow, 4 October-11 December 1999.

¹⁰⁴ *Spectacular Bodies. The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now*. (Know Thyself). Organized by the Hayward Gallery, London 19 October 2000- 14 January 2001. Exhibition curated by Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace and organized by Margot Heller (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000).

dissection rituals, physiognomy, phrenology, the diagnosis of mental illnesses, and today's often controversial artistic body images.

Throughout these examples what is apparent is the distinctiveness of each exhibition. On the other hand, what is also clear is the presence of elements which tie them together: art, science and the human body - i.e. the anatomical body. This growing interest in linking art and science has simultaneously been experienced in private institutions and art galleries. These exhibitions demonstrate the determination to develop methods to suppress the barriers between those two fields which have often been divided into their own mutually exclusive worlds in order to stimulate an exchange that may ultimately benefit both: for art, the chance to gain inspiration from science's insights into the natural world; for science, an opportunity to view an entirely new perspective on research.

Accordingly, these museums and galleries have hosted innovative exhibitions on aspects of the relationship between medical science and art. Each project, although different in form, combined insight from science and art and was involved creating platforms for the research, development and promotion of artistic practice related to medical science. These exhibitions have also been dedicated to identifying the shared concerns running through contemporary art and biomedical sciences. But above all, these presentations have encouraged project outcomes to be shared with diverse audiences.

Today, art and science - with anatomy at the center of the analysis - which have been connected for centuries - even if until the seventeenth century, the reasons for studying

anatomy were largely religious, philosophical and artistic, rather than medical - are once again the foundation of research and inquiry about, or rather “into” the body.

Just as the curators and organisers of these exhibition participated in this revival of anatomy, Annette Messenger’s work participates in this new trend and in this desire to access and discover the interior body.

2) The Body and Contemporary Thought

Annette Messenger’s arrangement examines, reflects as well as generates today’s contemporary fascination with the body. Although the body represented in *Penetration* is fragmented in recognizable parts and missing important distinctive elements - such as arms, legs, skin... - it is unmistakeably a body. A conceptual body, but a body nonetheless. For the visitor, the assemblage of organs recalls anatomical textbooks. And presented as it is by the artist this arrangement induces the correlation with the human body. However, questions remain when penetrating the body inside *Penetration*: how may and should this body be evaluated? And what type of body is Messenger addressing and representing?

The body we inhabit is a contested space, one which artists have been speaking of and from for a long time. In attempting to write about the body, it is impossible to avoid its dichotomies. It is a cultural and historical phenomenon as well as biological and material.

Because of these discrepancies - the body being a once a material life form and an allegory - it seems difficult to determine with certainty what the body is.

Just as it is difficult to explain the body, the body in *Penetration* is at once solid and fragile, weak and strong, concrete and metaphorical, an ever present and ever distant thing - a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity.

In this time of rapid technological advances and change, the body is being theoretically deconstructed, technologically fragmented and politically re-territorialized. The body has become an object of intense intellectual fascination, a realm of futuristic fantasy and indeed a grounding point of profound social preoccupation. This concern can be felt, for instance, through popular focus on physical appearance, health and aging.

In the article entitled “The End of the Body?” anthropologist Emily Martin suggests that although the widespread interest in the body may be accounted for by the contemporary centrality of the body in Western social forms, it may also be due to the contemporary historical moment in which “we are undergoing fundamental changes in how our bodies are organized and experienced.”¹⁰⁵ According to Martin, in our contemporary society, the human body can no longer be considered a “bounded entity” but rather a result of the challenging impact of social processes of commodification, fragmentation, and the semiotic barrage of images of body parts. Further she argues that society is seeing “the

¹⁰⁵ Emily Martin, “The End of the Body?” *American Ethnologist*, (February 1992), 120-138. Reprinted in Roger Lancaster and Michaela di Leonardo, *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 1997)

end of one kind of body and the beginning of another kind of body”¹⁰⁶ and that this new body that has emerged should be understood not as a constant flux but as an archetype of that flux. What Martin suggests is that today we are undergoing fundamental changes in how our bodies are organized and experienced and that as a result, the “problem” of the body has been thrown into relief.

This ‘new’ type of body and embodiment which Emily Martin exposes is at the heart of Annette Messager’s work: a body which is represented in an undefined and disquieting state. One cannot predict its outcome and its manipulations do not aim to perfect, but rather to transform and re-define.

In the past decades the body has come to the center of theoretical debates. Beginning in the early 1970s, the body has assumed a critical presence on the stage of interdisciplinary cultural studies. The kind of body which we have been accustomed to, in scholarly and popular thought, is typically assumed to be a fixed, material entity, subject to the empirical rules of biological science, existing prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity and characterized by unchangeable inner necessities. However, the new body that has recently begun to be identified can no longer be considered as a brute fact of nature. Michel Foucault first articulated that the body is a problematic notion. For

¹⁰⁶ Emily Martin, “The End of the Body?,” *id.*, 120-138.

Foucault the body had a history and should be understood as an epitome of that flux rather than as a constant among a flux.¹⁰⁷

Since the 1990s, scholarly and artistic productions present a human body which, far from being a self-evident organic whole, is at best a construct and a phantasmatic space¹⁰⁸, imagined very differently over time and across various cultural contexts. Because the body is passing through a critical historical moment, this moment also offers a critical methodological opportunity to reformulate theories of culture, self, and experience, with the body at the centre of the analysis.

Accordingly, in this time of reformulations the question which comes to mind is: what counts as a body today?

Nancy Armstrong, describes the body as functioning as an image or sign we use to understand social relationships, which include the relationship between ourselves as selves and the body within which, as modern selves, we find ourselves enclosed. In *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, Armstrong argues that “cultural stereotypes are real, not because they refer to real bodies, but because they allow us to identify and classify

¹⁰⁷ For an account of Michel Foucault’s reading of the body see, Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) and Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique : une archéologie du regard médical* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1978.)

¹⁰⁸ As it is characterized by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtapositions.

bodies, including our own, as image-object with a place and name within a still-expanding visual order.”¹⁰⁹

Therefore, what establishes the body at the centre of contemporary debates is its altering state, its uncertainty - the fact that its boundaries and its definition are continually challenged. At a time when the body is being rethought and reconsidered by artists and writers as well as restructured and reconstituted by scientists and engineers our systems of order must be re-evaluated.

As one of the authorities in the field of photography William A. Ewing argues in *The Body: Photographs of the Human Form*,

“in an era when parts can be routinely detached from one body and plugged into another; when the U.S. National Institutes of Health offer to replace corpses in medical schools with ‘industry-standard digital cadavers’; when certain machines can appropriate the functions of human organs, while others are invested with intelligence; when the life of the body can be prolonged when the mind has ceased to function; when genetic change can be engineered and human beings cloned; when a foetus can be nurtured in an artificial womb, or jobbed-out to a surrogate mother; when we entrust automatons to land our jets or perform operations on our bodies; when the *New York Times* informs us that, contrary to what most of us had believed, there are three, four or possibly five genders; when we capriciously rebuild faces, breasts or thighs to conform to the moment’s ideal of beauty; and when we dream of ‘Robocops’, ‘Terminators’ and ‘Replicants’, and long to live in a *virtual* reality - then concepts and definitions, values and beliefs, rights and laws, must be radically overhauled.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography. The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999), 31.

¹¹⁰ William A. Ewing, *The Body: Photographs of the Human Form* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, c1994), 9.

It is widely accepted that representations of the body are a means for generating dynamic cultural meanings, structuring complex social relations and establishing flows of power. When anatomical textbooks are closely examined, both for their visual representations and accompanying descriptions, the presence of a constant standard, a generic body can be distinguished: usually that of the white male. The male body is displayed, even where it is not necessary, to show what is being discussed in the text: for example, discussions of muscle tissue or nerves. It is unusual to see depictions of the female body alone other than in relation to its reproductive functioning (the Eighteenth century Italian wax models come to mind). It is rather obvious that the single representation of the human body was masculine. Although today, contemporary anatomical textbooks include the female body, the standard which seems to remain keeps strongly suggesting the male predominance.

Since the Modern era, the human body has been flattened - onto the model of the machine - and divested of the incarnate value of the human presence: thus set as an object amongst others. At the beginning of the twentieth century, French writer, poet and art critic, Paul Valéry affirmed that human beings suffered from what he identified as the “three-body problem,” which he assessed could never be resolved. He argued that one body is the one we possess: the one we live in which he considered as the most important object in the world. This is the self that we experience. The second body is the public façade, the body which has form and is apprehended in the arts, the body on which materials and ornaments sit: the body which craves to touch. We can call the second body the subject of traditional artistic portrayal. The third body is the physical machine that we know about only for having dissected and dismembered it. It is the body we are most

estranged from and that beauty covers and helps us to deny. Valéry's description is evocative of the evaluation of the way the body is understood in the modern era.

Although Messenger's construction is produced approximately fifty years after Valéry's description, I believe Messenger is familiar with the essayist's theory. Because Valéry is a prominent figure of French thought his poetry is exhaustively studied in French schools and as such I will contend that Messenger has most likely come into contact with the argument aforementioned.

In addition, I assert that with *Penetration* Messenger is attempting to bridge the three notions of the body discussed by Valéry. Inside the installation piece (public façade), Messenger represents the body as apprehended via dissection (the internal machine) and positions at its center the viewer's body (the one we possess).

Today, in many domains of expertise the human body is still understood as an astounding feat of engineering. Medicine, for example, celebrates the human body as a unitary entity. In "Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies" Kathryn Pauly Morgan argues that "although there continue to be substantive theoretical challenges to its dominant metaphors, Western scientific medicine views the human body essentially as a machine."¹¹ For health-care practitioners the body is a neutral and obvious assemblage of structural "facts." In books on anatomy, "the body" actually appears like an abstract construction rather than having a variable materiality or being

¹¹ Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies," in *Body and the Flesh. A philosophical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1998), 329.

possessed by a particular human subject. (It is this represented abstractness - the idealization of “the body”- this thesis is concerned with.) The body is displayed as being made up of parts that can be separated, isolated and later, hopefully, put back together. Consequently, we can clearly comprehend how this perspective has facilitated viewing the body in atomistic and mechanical fashion and why the anatomists have been characterized as dismantling “machines” and “removing its pieces one by one” rather than simply epitomized as “opening up” bodies.

3) Contemporary Medical Imaging and the Body

Medical images represent things a doctor rarely and/or never sees, and bring an appearance of certitude into being. Ideally, they serve as a record of morphology and physiology. But like anatomical illustrations, microscope slides or diagnostic tools such as PET scans, do more than simply confirm the presence or absence of disease. In a time of rapid technologic development, it is important that all processes, which influence diagnostic outcome be carefully examined to determine their influence on the whole.

Following Scott Curtis’s thought from “*As Tangible as Tissue: Film and Medical Hermeneutics*” modern medicine was born from the desire to read the body like a book: “to look, to impose order, to translate the visible body into other medical discourses” and

as he states it later “to hold it in one’s hands, to control the pace at which knowledge is presented and understood.”¹¹²

Changes in medical technologies have constituted part of the history of the body and entered into the struggle over the meanings and productiveness of different kinds of bodies. The desire to visualize the interior of the body has been a central aspect of Western medicine for its entire duration. Over the past fifty years, technology has made it possible to replace internal joints and external extremities with artificial analogues. But these advances raise questions surrounding the limits of what is a body as well as what is human. For instance, what are the implications of the robotic bodies and minds which technology brings into existence?

Because the human gaze elucidates facts, the history of medicine can be understood as the history of the mutations of this gaze. Since the beginning of its history the medical field has had a predilection for representing the human body and different imaging techniques have been central to how the interior of the body has been presented and imagined throughout history. The anatomy lesson allowed the physician not only to “peer in” and image the unseen, but to “reach in” and probe at his leisure, thereby managing an otherwise uncontrollable form. Dissection became the most “cutting” manifestation in medicine’s two impulses to read and to handle. With photography, the camera was perceived as an all-seeing instrument. Later, when x-rays were invented they offered a new vision of the human body. Where photo-mechanical images fragment the body in the

¹¹² Scott Curtis, “As Tangible Tissue: Film and Medical Hermeneutics.” Conference given at the *Visible Evidence Conference*, UCLA, Los Angeles, California, August 19-22, 1999.

process of diagnosis and identification computer images can re-form the body and, through placing it in an analogical relation with space, make it whole.

The utility of employing an image as a surrogate was recognized in earlier times though for simpler diagnostic ends. Clearly, since the beginning of its history clinical anatomy has implied a radical transformation in the epistemological status of the body. As Rosi Braidotti argues in *Nomadic Subjects*, anatomy "... is a practice that consists in deciphering the body, transforming the organism into a text to be read and interpreted by a medical gaze."¹¹³ But different medical texts require different readings. Scientific illustration, though often highly representational - "realistic-looking" - differs from photo-realism and other representational genres because its priority is not necessarily that it look "real." Its priority is to communicate specific information and the result of the representation might or might not be visually realistic. Scientific illustration includes maps, charts, and diagrams, natural science subjects, and things we've never seen or cannot see (black holes, quantum particles, etc.) While scientific imagery and publication have undergone a remarkable evolution through time, what remains constant is the use of clear graphics, visual conventions and colour to convey complex, dynamic processes in clear, compact and readily understandable forms - well-crafted images being arguably the most efficient way to communicate complex information and ideas.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the fascination for measuring and mapping the body - which sometimes took on somewhat doubtful disciplines of categorizing and

¹¹³ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 67.

discriminating human “types” - led to the introduction of new visual conventions. In addition to the explosion of portrait photography, photography was taken up by scientists and in medical institutions to provide a visual record of experiments, to document diseases, and to register scientific data. The belief in the capacity of the photograph to help see beyond the human eye and to create new frontiers of vision was coupled with its increased use for institutional regulation and categorization or archiving of people. During the nineteenth century, medical researchers, hospitals, prisons and the police, psychiatrists, and lay photographers catalogued people’s bodies on photographic film in order to create archives of types of pathologies for institutional records. The creation of images of the other was thus enabled by the use of the camera in the name of scientific inquiry.

With the x-ray and other contemporary methods of medical imagery, the prominence of the gaze in the structure of knowledge remained static. Today, the performativity of the machines has attained a high degree of technicality, particularly in the case of the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), but it hasn’t concealed the fundamental mediation of the eye. This is a paradoxical situation. In our technological world where the rejection of sensorial experiences other than vision takes place, the utility of our technology is still dependent upon sight without which greater penetration inside the corporal zones would still be inaccessible and invisible.

The advantage of contemporary medical imaging is that it offers a representation of the body which provides spatially discrete information for interpretation. Today’s technology

offers an abundance of imaging options. Of these, no single modality has prevailed to the exclusion of others.

The technical development of medical imaging began with the digitalization and computerization of the traditional x-ray techniques, which had not previously changed significantly for the eighty years since their invention by Roentgen. X-rays were heralded as images of divine transparency (often referred to as “the eye of the Creator”), and for a brief while x-ray imaging was more popular than its fellow fledgling popular scientific imaging device, the cinema. The technological expansion is continuing now with a process called Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) which is capable of detailing not only the body’s anatomy (structure) but also its physiology (function). The body is subjected to the transmission, reflection or emission of energy in the form of radiation. The body can now be anatomized ‘live’ and functioning because the process of imaging can replace the practice of dissection in the search of medical knowledge. Considered by many in the medical profession to be the gold standard for imaging the human body Magnetic Resonance Imaging technology is certainly has improved the ability to resolve human anatomy to a new standard, which enables more timely treatments.

Transmission imaging is centred on the traditional x-ray and its enhanced form is known as Computer Tomography (CT). Conventional radiographs view the body from only one angle and so the shadows of bone, muscle and organs are superimposed. In CT, the scanner containing the source and receptor is rotated around the stationary body and provides a cross-sectional image or ‘slice’ from any given angle. From a cultural

perspective one of the more important features of Computed Tomography is that it overcomes the limitations of viewpoint by giving a three-dimensional reconstructive imaging.

In an era where medical imaging techniques provide a simplified, less complex and at the same time more specific image of the internal human body, the feeling of transgression and fascination encountered during the earlier dissections has disappeared and has given place to a clean and “friendly” - open - human body, which is only understood as the agent of a didactic approach.

On the one hand, contemporary medical images often stand in for direct experience, as they can represent the things a physician cannot usually see: bodily interiors and pathologies. On the other, visual representations can function as substitutes that a doctor is not capable of seeing. To the point where, for example, in the eyes of the patient the MRI has become synonymous with “not missing anything”: as being considered as the most reliable tool. Patients often assume that their physicians can’t possibly keep up with rapid advances in medical technology. In many instances patients are threatened by the prospect that something can go wrong. Consequently, it is not uncommon, they request an MRI on their first visit to their doctor. As a result, the physician often obliges by ordering an MRI even if the physical exam and history dictate otherwise.

However, as one of the founding fathers of the new discipline of the Philosophy of Technology, Don Ihde argues in “Bodies, Virtual Bodies and Technology” while

discussing the artificiality of the technological image of the video-game, the shortcomings of “other simulation forms has to do with the ‘framing’” and “while the screen may even surround the viewer in maximal settings, the quasi depth of the screen remains a detectable film-artifact. Everything is in front of the participant.”¹¹⁴ I believe this reading of the video-games can be adapted to suit contemporary medical images. If we think of medical imaging in those terms we can understand how the contemporary - i.e. technological - scientific image can be said to maintain the viewer at a distance - as dissociated from the represented body that appears onto the screen.

One exception confirms the rule. Since the early 1980s, the idea that women visually bond with their future children through the image of the sonogram has circulated in the medical profession. The image is understood as having the power to encourage emotional bonding much more than textual descriptions of the foetus ever could. In the case of the foetal sonogram the biomedical image takes on the *aura* of a portrait, a document of the foetus’s status as a social being (as a person) and not just a biological entity.

In the rise of the natural sciences in the nineteenth-century and in bio-medicine today, vision is understood as a primary avenue to knowledge. Sight takes precedence over the other senses as a primary tool in the analysis and ordering of living things. Hence, an ultrasound image taken by a doctor will be received as more reliable than a woman’s description of her bodily sensations of pregnancy - or what has been termed “self-evidence.” The paradox of the clinical gaze and its legacy, then, is that vision may

¹¹⁴ Don Ihde, “Bodies, Virtual Bodies and Technology” in *Body and Flesh. A philosophical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Malden Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 355.

predominate, but in some cases it is nonetheless dependent upon other sensory and cognitive processes. The paradoxical nature of this “visual system” - ultrasound - that involves imaging is complicated by the fact sonography is a “sound” system that involves neither hearing nor the production of noise per se. In *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual culture*, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright argue “the visual may ‘steal the show,’ but it is not the whole picture of biomedical knowledge”¹¹⁵ - this point will be carefully developed in the next chapter.

Today, the belief in the capacity of the photograph and new technological tools to see beyond the human eye and to create a sense of new frontiers of vision is questioned. Although, for example, CT and MRI scanners attempt to visualize the invisible, in *Medicines New Vision*, author Howard Sochurek argues that today, “our ability to make pictures is greater than our ability to solve them.”¹¹⁶

Along the same lines of reasoning in *Virtual Anxieties* Sarah Kember raises the question: “what is the significance of the development and implementation of technologies which supersede the capacity of the clinical eye in diagnosis?” To demonstrate her point she recounts the story of a man who had a brain scan that revealed the presence of a large tumour. During the operation the brain surgeon could not see the tumour. Despite the reassurances of the imaging specialist, he declined to continue on the foundation that he could not remove a tumour he could not see. A biopsy suggested by the imaging

¹¹⁵ Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, “Scientific Looking. Looking at Science” in *Practices of Looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 300.

¹¹⁶ Howard Sochurek, *Medicines New Vision* (Eaton Pennsylvania: Mack, 1988), 151.

specialist confirmed the presence of a tumour and “the surgeon was obliged to operate blind.”¹¹⁷ The argument introduced by Kember is, as she identifies it, “the crisis and transition in anatomical investigation” where the “diagnosis is carried out within a massive optical system which literally encloses the body as its object.”¹¹⁸ Today, at a time where medical images become more and more “realistic” and invasive, doctors are faced with the difficulty of completely understanding and/or reading them.

When one discusses medical imagery it should not be forgotten that no matter how faithful to human anatomy contemporary medical imagery is, it is not the body itself but a mere representation of it. Recognition that information in a medical image is derived from a symbolic concept leads to easier acceptance of the utility of functional and more simplified imaging. It is thus clear that although we are always searching for a medical imaging technique that will provide a simplified, less complex and at the same time more specific image, we must also consider imaging overkill in the diagnostic process. Imaging overkill can result in forgetting to undertake different diagnostic processes. This view can lead to a greater understanding of differences between visual sensory information gathered directly from body organs and that gathered indirectly from their representation in medical images. Consequently, we can affirm that today diagnostic imaging is moving into a new era in which the role played by our visual capacities must be characterized, and our limitations either compensated for or knowledgeably accepted.

¹¹⁷ Sarah Kember, “New Imaging Technologies in Medicine and Law,” in *Virtual Anxieties* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), 55.

¹¹⁸ Sarah Kember, “New Imaging Technologies in Medicine and Law,” *id.*, 55.

Anthropologist, David Le Breton argues in “Les yeux du dedans: imagerie médicale et imaginaire”¹¹⁹ that another limitation exists in technological images: the medical image has been cleansed in various stages through time. What Le Breton means by “cleansed” is that throughout history the medical image has always been returned to the tangible and has been made more penetrating in order to facilitate a certain control over the body. According to him, in only a few centuries, images have been steadily sanitized of any trace of symbolism. We have inherited the atlas and the anatomical method from the Enlightenment period but today the invention of sophisticated machinery of visioning - from the microscope, radiological imaging (x-rays) to Positron Emission Tomography (PET) for instance - has supplemented and intensified the aforementioned capacity to peer inside the human body as well as the ability to understand it. With the rejection of distance, liable to an era, a structure of the image, which stems from the sign-effect, is being decoded. This modern system which is tied to the real, duplicates it and intends to occult any possibility of imaginary. The scientific image is conceived as pure information, stripped from any metaphorical residue, freed from what French philosopher Gaston Bachelard calls, in *Poétique de la rêverie*,¹²⁰ any “arrière-image”. The passage of the body to the image, from the flesh to the monitor, is said to transpose without distance or supplement. However, Le Breton goes on to say that although the contemporary technological image is reduced to pure information and divested from its thickness, like any image, it can nonetheless favour the drift and prompt digression. Using the example of the skeleton Le Breton defends that the skeleton is a sanitized anatomical figure.

¹¹⁹ David Le Breton « Les yeux du dedans : imagerie médicale et imaginaire » in *L'imaginaire des techniques de pointe; au doigt et à l'œil*, sous la responsabilité de Alain Gras et Sophie L. Poirot-Delpech, (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1989)

¹²⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *Poétique de la rêverie* (Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1965)

According to Le Breton, the skeleton is the element which serves for courses on human formation and simultaneously an archetypical figure - for instance, a symbol of nightmares and terror. For Le Breton the imaginary which once lived inside the image has today fled from the inside of the body, yet its representation reappears with vitality outside of it by way of the viewer's eyes.

This dilemma doesn't exist in *Penetration*. Although the installation is based on the medical consensus and on the normative model of the human body's insides, and while it maintains a certain distance from the viewer, unlike technological images, Messenger's representation leaves room for digressions. Where in contemporary medical imagery the imaginary is relegated outside the image, with *Penetration*, the imaginary exists both inside and outside the image: inside the representation and inside the viewer's mind, memory and body.

As she stated in a 1995 interview given to journalist and art critic, Natasha Leoff: "Obviously I come from a specific generation of artists, but let's say by using the kinds of timeless materials - cloth, paper, crayons - that are not directly linked to today's technologies I am interested in transcending a certain temporality. I would love to work with video, but somehow I feel incapable of using that kind of material today. I would like to use video as easily as I use a pencil."¹²¹ In the end what Messenger had considered as a deficiency - the fact that she wasn't able to think in technological terms - became an advantage and a strength. In an era where technology influences a specific way of

¹²¹ Natasha Leoff, Interview with the artist, *Journal of Contemporary Art Online*, 1995.

looking, Messenger affirms via her installation piece that the interior of the body can be represented without technology and as such by bypassing the problems liable to new technologies the artist proposes a new model of the interior, interiority and embodiment.

4) Curiosity and Interiority

The structure of the body has been a primary source of discussion and research. Actually, medical cultures that emphasized the study of anatomy climaxed centuries ago (in Alexandria) then declined, climaxed again during the Renaissance, then declined, and climaxed again in the last century. Between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries, a new feeling emerged: curiosity, and wonder became primarily the territory of the cultural elite, who cultivated it for power, prestige, or in praise of their Maker. Despite classical precedents like Pliny's *Natural History*, wonders first gained widespread currency in medieval encyclopaedias, bestiaries, and romances. Later, "[i]n the hands of sixteenth and seventeenth century virtuosi and collectors," Katherine Park and Lorraine Daston explain, in *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, these objects "became occasions for elaborate exercises in taste and connoisseurship."¹²² During the Renaissance, the cabinets were filled with objects deriving from the finding of classical artifacts and texts, the exotic discoveries from the New World, the contact with Africa, Asia, and the Far East, etc. *Artificialia* and *naturalia* were displayed aside new scientific inventions and ethnographic items.

¹²² Lorraine J. Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, (New York: Zone Books, [1998] 2001)

If the experiments of artists don't definitively advance science or knowledge the experiments on the body done by contemporary artists - their testing out taboos and imperatives, challenging conventional fears and reinvesting in excluded possibilities - can serve as important social experiments which advance the understanding and awareness of science.

As scientific discoveries became better known, many wonders were explained and, once familiarized, lost their charm. Wonders that demonstrated aberrant nature gave way to more regular specimens illustrating nature's uniform laws. As a result, curiosity cabinets progressed into particular cabinets. Simultaneously to the legitimization of dissection for medical research and/or education, individuals set up anatomical cabinets in their houses where they gathered curiosities taken from human bodies and dissected cadavers. Due to their distinctiveness, cadavers and/or anatomical fragments were collected with the purpose to infuse their collector with a direct and more methodical knowledge of the body - and thus of the human being - and to facilitate medical practice.

Three related processes were implicit in the creation of curiosity cabinets: collection, organization, and display. The act of selecting the objects of any cabinet provided the first moment at which the individual - owner - began to impose order. The collector would decide what was not worthy of being collected and what offered the basis for evaluating their knowledge of the world. The will to collect was thus intimately tied in with the need to understand and control and to concede order where there was none before. The process was then continued once the decision had been made on an

organizational scheme into which the new natural and cultural trophies would fit. Any act of classification or categorization appears as a cognitive imperative, one that demands the imposition of meaning through a re-contextualization of objects. It is through classification and organization that theories are formed and supported, and that information becomes knowledge. But it is only at the third stage, that of display, that knowledge can be culturally ratified and transformed into received wisdom. It is the visual organization and public exposition of the knowledge systems that advertises the claims of ownership, legitimizes the scientific or social schemes, and disseminates the elements of cultural value that have been defined by the collection owner.

The collection constitutes the driving force of Annette Messenger's art. Her activity as collector is well documented. Early in her career Messenger identified herself as *Annette Messenger Collectionneuse* (Annette Messenger Collector). Additionally, several of her statements demonstrate her interest in that enterprise. In an interview with Robert Storr, she stated "collecting is reassuring, limitless..." and that she is "...attracted to repetition and collecting as a way of defying death - a collection is never finished because there's always something to add."¹²³ With her activity as a collector, Annette Messenger approaches art from a position that embraces two directions: that of its genesis and that of its destination.

Reminiscent of the medical cabinets Annette Messenger's *Penetration* suggests an attempt to classify and study the anatomical fragments with a desire to evoke reactions from

¹²³ Interview with Robert Storr in *Annette Messenger, Faire Parade 1971-1995* (Paris Musées: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 23 Mars- 21 Mai 1995), 102.

admiring visitors. Hence, her activity as collector is exemplified by the methodological interpretation of the body as well as in its display.

Messenger has adopted the medical visual vocabulary to facilitate the viewer's perception of the human's body interior. Like the three-dimensional models of body organs used by medical trainees to study the body's structure or by doctors to update their patients on their illnesses and procedures, Messenger's three-dimensional individual organs are certainly strikingly convincing in their realism. They represent a kidney, a heart, a lung and so on. When seen together they each have an integrity that suggests they have very little to do with each other. This is because of the exact limitedness and the finiteness of their shape, texture and colour: that is, the precision of the visual language that has been used to produce them. Represented in such a way they suggest the entirety of the body can be taken apart and separated to the point where when the organs are displayed next to one another or again re-assembled they may either make out an immense composition of pieces or a re-structured body. Obviously, Messenger's way of representing the body and the way it works is imperfect but it is a way of depicting the body that has its roots in a specific visual language since they recall three-dimensional medical models.

Since part of the interest in medical imagery lies in its capacity to render the banal fantastic and the familiar strange and, because part of the fascination with Messenger's work resides in her ability to represent the body as abstracted and estranged from the rules of conformity and normalcy, it can be understood why the viewer is tempted to enter the work.

The sceptical impulse to access the visceral interior of the other's body is portrayed in *Penetration*. Actually, the curiosity that pushes the viewer to enter the work can be linked to the curiosity that pushes the child to take apart his or her toys. That gesture enables and facilitates his or her discovery of how the inside is made. In *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti argues that "according to psychoanalytic interpretation the scopic drive is linked to both knowledge and control or domination. In other words, the practice that consists in opening something up so to see how it functions: the impulse to go and see, to "look in" is the most fundamental and childlike form of control over the other's body."¹²⁴ The decision to enter the work is, in other words, a basic archaic impulse related to the problem of representing one's origin and of answering the most childish and consequently fundamental question: "where do I come from?" or what am I made of? Because *Penetration* means, by definition, the ability to understand or perceive something, one can speculate about the idea the impulse to open up the body of the other can derive from the desire to know the other - in order to know him or her better - and to know oneself.

In the past, part of the mystery surrounding the body came from the generally held idea that the bodily entrails held the secret to the individual's nature - that the soul was situated within the body and opening up the examining the body would reveal the secrets of the soul. In "Visceral Knowledge" David Hillman cites seventeenth century anatomical writer, Helkiah Crooke. Crooke is mentioned as stating: "anatomy is as it were a most certain and sure guide to the admirable and most excellent knowledge of our

¹²⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 67.

selves that is of our own proper nature.”¹²⁵ Today, a tension resides between the idea that truth is self-evident in the surface appearance of things, and the contrasting idea that truth lies hidden elsewhere, in internal structures or systems of the body, and that scientific representational techniques may uncover evidence of these hidden truths. The idea that the truth lies beneath the surface, and needs to be seen to be fully understood, has predominated in Western culture since the time of the Greeks. And it is a common sign in contemporary culture to use the image of looking inside someone as seeing “true” identity. A contemporary Toshiba advertisement (2000) clearly illustrates this point. In it a man in profile is looking toward a computer screen onto which the MRI image of a face is represented above the slogan “No one tries to understand you more than we do.” From this we gather that understanding becomes linked to the capacity to see into someone’s interior. Consequently, the knowledge of the interior of the body is equated with the knowledge of interiority, with the entrails as a crucial locus of subjectivity. In *Penetration* the human’s insides are exposed to a penetrative gaze. Interestingly, I believe that they are treated, like Jean Starobinsky would say, as: “the object of an external knowing... capable of being confirmed.”¹²⁶

With the rise of the natural sciences in the nineteenth-century and in bio-medicine today, vision was and still is today understood as a primary avenue to knowledge where sight takes precedence over the other senses as a primary tool in the analysis and ordering of living things. Because the body which is shown by *Messenger* is interdependent with the

¹²⁵ David Hillman, “Visceral Knowledge” in David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, *The Body in Parts* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 84.

¹²⁶ Jean Starobinski, “The Body’s Moment” in *Montaigne: Essays in Reading*, ed. Gérard Defaux, Yale French Studies 64 (1983): 273-305, at 276.

body of the viewer as well as with the space it is represented in, the way of looking is all encompassing.

What makes *Penetration* a unique composition is that the viewer inside the work is exposed to an active experience of the human body. Borrowing Rosalind Krauss's idiom, the space of *Penetration* becomes "discerned physically rather than optically."¹²⁷ In "Richard Serra: Sculpture," a number of Serra's monumental sculptures are examined using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's, 1945 work entitled, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Amongst the phenomenological thinkers Merleau-Ponty has had the most influence on recent art criticism. He defined phenomenology as a science of beginnings and insisted the starting point for philosophical, historical, and cultural analysis is how we are in the world of perception. According to him, perception is basic bodily experience, where the body is not an object but a subject, and where embodiment is the condition for us to have any objects - that is, to objectify reality - in the first place.

The first world explored by *The Phenomenology of Perception* is the body as it is understood as the preobjective ground of all experience. In this work Merleau-Ponty pursued the thesis that it is primarily through our lived body that we have access to what he called the "primary world." According to him, without such a body there would be no world at all for us. Merleau-Ponty's ideas had been assimilated by a first generation of minimalist artists who had come to accept that "if the object is an invariable structure, it

¹²⁷ Rosalind Krauss "Richard Serra: Sculpture" in *Richard Serra/Sculpture*, ed. Laura Rosenstock (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986.)

is not one *in spite* of the change of perspective, but *in* that change or *through* it.”¹²⁸ From then on minimalists grounded the object in the play of perspectives and sited vision. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “spatiality without things” had also been used and had given intellectual and theoretical weight to the generation of the 1960s preoccupations about abstract art. According to Krauss, “for Serra the only way to approach the preobjective world is through the use of form that, though palpable and material - directly engaging the viewer’s body - is rigorously nonfigurative, insistently abstract.”¹²⁹ Analyzing Serra’s 1976, 16 minutes film, *Railroad Turnbridge*, Krauss concludes “that view and viewer are mutually implicated both at the level of form and at the level of *dispositif*, or apparatus of vision.” She goes on to say when discussing the landscape sculptures and particularly *St. John’s Rotary Arc* (1981) (Fig.40) that “all trajectories live in the indissoluble marriage of the spatial with the temporal” and that “the articulation of the movement of the viewer’s body-in-destination becomes the medium rather than the subject of the work.” In conclusion, Krauss states that it is only through the placing of the abstract subject within the specificities of place “that the abstracted subject can be made to appear.”¹³⁰

Inside *Penetration*, as the viewer walks toward the center of the room and consequently to the centre of the work, he or she is forced to acknowledge the space above, below, left, right, up and down. To be inside the work is to experience enclosure and to be outside the

¹²⁸ Maurice-Merleau Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, (Paris, 1945). Translated by Colin Smith, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 90.

¹²⁹ Rosalind Krauss, id., 130.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 141.

work is to witness exteriority. Accordingly, inside *Penetration*, the implication of the viewer's body is unavoidable - whether he or she is or isn't an active participant inside the body - the viewer will nonetheless be part of the installation and its creation, whether it be with one of his or her senses - his gaze - or with all of them - his body. In the end, the result of the experience becomes a way of measuring oneself - through plays of scale - inside and against the represented body.

5) Penetrating the Human Body

With *Penetration*, Annette Messenger has made it possible for the viewer/actor to access the body's interior both visually and physically. By presenting and re-presenting the internal organs as she does - anatomically correct coloured fabric organs that are however larger than life - Messenger allows the viewer to cross a boundary that had been unmanageable without the use of technology.

The interest to travel inside the body is not a recent phenomenon. By examining examples taken from the contemporary Western culture - which have been selected according to their significance - we can value the prominence and fascination that human beings have placed entering the human body. For example, in 1966, a science fiction movie titled *Fantastic Voyage*¹³¹ showed a government security agent and a surgical team miniaturized and inserted into a dying scientist's (scientist who had been shot and who

¹³¹ *Fantastic Voyage*, Film directed by Richard Fleischer, with Stephen Boyd, Raquel Welch, Donald Pleasence, 1966.

had developed an inoperable brain clot) blood stream.¹³² Today, that fantasy survives. In 2000, Macintosh developed a game entitled *Fantastic Voyage 2.0* which involves traveling inside the human body, seeing red cells, glands, even cholesterol and in addition killing infections. As, reviewer and critic, Scott Rosenberg writes in “Body Bits,” “on a bevy of popular CD-ROMs and, increasingly, on the Net, model bodies are being diagrammed, dissected and reanimated, limb by limb, organ by organ. The purpose is uniformly educational, but the fascination, let’s face it, stems more from the subject’s inherent luridness than from its redeeming social value. The inheritance of Leonardo Da Vinci can’t help getting mixed up with the inheritance of Edgar Allan Poe, *The Twilight Zone* and superhero-style X-ray vision.”¹³³

In contemporary medicine, the procedure used to see inside various parts of the body is called endoscopy.¹³⁴ It is a general term and consequently specific words for viewing specific parts and organs of the body exist, such as intestinal endoscopy. It has long been possible to insert tubes into body orifices, but in order to see clearly a method was needed to illuminate the inside of the organ.¹³⁵ It is only after the invention and application of fiber-optic technology that medical endoscopy really came into its own. Contemporary

¹³² Along the way, the surgical laser gets damaged, they run low on oxygen, and they race through the scientist’s temporarily stopped heart. Running out of time, and about to return to their normal size, the mini-team zaps the scientist’s brain clot with the laser beam, then exit the body via his tear ducts.

¹³³ Scott Rosenberg, “Body Bits”, *Salon Magazine 21st*, (online magazine), April 24, 1997.

¹³⁴ The word endoscopy is derived from the Greek words “endo” meaning “inside” and “skopeein” meaning “to see”.

¹³⁵ The earliest crude attempts used oil lamps, which were later replaced by small electric filament bulbs. These were not very bright and tended to produce a lot of heat.

technology made it possible for cameras to be inserted inside the body and render it transparent and permeable.

Ultrasound images provide another example of a kind of medical viewing that enables patients and doctors alike to look deeply inside the human body. In the 1960s the principals of the sonar, which had been developed extensively during the second world war, were applied to diagnostic imaging creating the technology of the ultrasounds. The process involves placing a small device called a transducer, against the skin of the patient near the region of interest, for example, the kidneys. This transducer produces a stream of inaudible, high frequency sound waves which penetrate into the body and bounce off the organs inside. The transducer detects sound waves as they bounce off or echo back from the internal structures and contours of the organs. These waves are received by the ultrasound machine and turned into live pictures with the use of computers and reconstruction software.

As a result, technological innovations have transformed our relationship to our own bodies as well as our relationship to others. Today, patients undergoing ultrasound and endoscopic procedures frequently get to view their procedure in real time, and are given copies of the tape to take home. And today, we are able to see what was yesterday sacrilege and even sometimes impossible to fathom. However, although we are brought closer to our body, technology still denies us the total physical and sensorial experience. Where medical photography had fragmented the exterior of the body in the process of diagnosis and identification (facilitating scopophilic investments such as voyeurism and

fetishism) new medical imaging technologies have appeared to make the body whole, through placing it in an analogical relation with space. A priori, the advantage of medical imaging is that it offers a representation of the body, which provides spatially discrete information for interpretation. Today, within the abundance of imaging options offered by technological advances, computer images produce extraordinary representations of the body, which rather than being fragmented by the visual codes of photography, appear to be rendered whole in an analogical relationship with space. Present-day fields like biomedical visualization continue to negotiate the fine line between depicting the body's complex physiological systems and communicating that information in ways any spectator can comprehend - that is, negotiating the ways we "see" what others "mean." In other words, the body is analogically mapped.

Although these advances have permitted a better visualization of the body, what we tend to forget is that every medical technology - whether it is measuring blood pressure, temperature, pulse rate or taking x-rays, CT scans, mammograms, ultra-sounds, etc... - destabilizes the already precarious borders between interior and exterior of the body as they either allow access to data that would be impossible without it or visualize the invisible, in order to record the living body. New technologies break down the barriers between the inside and the outside of the human body, yet they simultaneously create a distance between that interior and the exterior.

A priori different in methodology, medical imaging and Messenger's version of installation art actually question the relationship between interior and interiority. In both

projects, the analogy between the interior body and interiority is problematized. With medical imaging the “modernizing” of the interior of the human body drives the location of the self away from the body and toward a purely mechanistic understanding of the relation of the self to a standardized corpus. With *Penetration*, as Catherine Grenier puts forward, in her monograph on the artist, “the viewer is asked to enter into the substance of the work, to meet its instability and contingency head on, even though the material itself may be more than a dissemination of his or her own body, a projection of the intimacy of the ego into a public space.”¹³⁶ Inside *Penetration* the boundary between inside and outside become blurred and the viewers who choose to enter the work become placed in the “in-between.”

Analogous to what is happening in medical imaging, inside *Penetration* the limits of the body are also distorted. In medical imagery the boundary that is blurred is evidently the one that exists between the exterior and interior of one and the same body - namely that of the patient. At first, with *Penetration* what is being obscured is the boundary that lives between two distinct bodies: between the interior of the represented body and the viewer’s own. However, upon closer examination what is additionally blurred is the viewer’s own body limitations (the one’s between his or her own exterior and interior.)

¹³⁶ Catherine Grenier, *Annette Messager* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 145.

Penetration becomes a space of inquiry about the body as well as about the self. By choosing to overlook¹³⁷ the largest element of the body - the skin - and accordingly by allowing the viewer to wander, straightforwardly, between the various internal organs and viscera Messenger has actually allowed the viewer to enter, unequivocally, into the matter of the work. If the viewer chooses to stay outside the installation, the substance of the work is still accessible visually. Since *Penetration* is an assemblage of separated entities it is the viewer who momentarily unifies the elements into a body - whether it be with their eyes and minds or with their body. By way of artistry, Annette Messenger has made it possible to take down the physical boundary that usually exists between two bodies and even between one and the same body.

Messenger's body is staged in such a way that the spectator is exposed and inevitably interested. Interested in the sense that he or she is affected and involved as well as curious and concerned. *Penetration* engages spectators and allows them a heightened awareness of the way in which they negotiate the politics of the gallery space, the work and the work's body as well as the subjectivities that are articulated in and around the composition.

The other impact this choice has, is one that is specific to the viewer who decides to enter the work. Inside the installation, the viewer becomes part of the work where he or she is, simultaneously, subjected to the other viewers' gaze and confronted with his or her own sense of embodiment. Up against an anonymous, fragmented and dismantled body the

¹³⁷ This point will be further developed later on in the thesis. In *Penetration*, Messenger chooses to use the walls of the exhibition area to delimit the space of the installation and consequently to delimit the boundaries of the body.

spectator finds himself or herself in the position of a voyeur, but a voyeur who also views himself (cf. transfer). In other words, three-dimensionality forces the viewers to participate in the work's construction (to be closely implicated in it) and accordingly to be faced with their own sense of dismemberment/lack/loss. Consequently, while investigating the work the spectators come across fragments of their body, superimposed, collected and multiplied so that each individual organ merges and intensifies the next. Messenger's work reflects the penetration of medical issues into every aspect of life such as concepts of life, birth, circulation of blood, death... With *Penetration* Messenger also represents the fragile relationship between the body and the mind, the physical and the emotional. Although it exists inside *Penetration*, the body does not come alive without the active mind and active body of the viewer. Similarly, although the human body may be living it generally does not become animated without an active conscious mind and an active body.

By way of artistic choices Messenger has resolved the question of capturing and experiencing the body's interior without having to miniaturize the viewer/actor as it had been the case in *Fantastic Travel*. What has been modified is the scale of the body which has been enlarged in order to allow the viewer to circulate within it.

Capturing the body in all its details and particularities has always been a concern of artists. In our technological era it is thus not surprising to see that several contemporary artists use technological imaging and implicate themselves with clinical procedures, in order to capture the body in ways that were not available to them before.

Mona Hatoum uses the body as a metaphor for social struggle and her best known work, *Foreign Body* (Corps Étranger, 1994) (Fig. 41-43) is closely associated with surgery since it was produced in collaboration with a surgeon. The video maps an internal and external self-portrait of the artist through such complex medical procedures as endoscopy, colonoscopy and the ultrasound. The artist began the work by passing a camera throughout her body, inserting it into each orifice as far as possible. Splicing the footage together into a continuous loop, Hatoum added a soundtrack consisting of magnified sounds of the body's internal organs. The video is projected onto the floor of a half-open oval structure which the viewer must enter to see the work clearly. The viewer's required position - standing over the projected image of the body's interior - creates a sense of vertigo, heightened by the degree of magnification and the relatively claustrophobic space.

Like Messenger's *Penetration*, *Foreign Body* can be compared to an *écorché* figure, a drawn or sculpted illustration of a human body from which the skin has been removed to expose the musculature and internal organs. Although *Foreign Body* feels like a public violation of the artist's body in which the viewer is the "foreign body" whose entrance into the womblike chamber becomes an act of penetration, the close-up shows you how Mona Hatoum's body is the same as everyone else's. What the artist has done with this work is present us with a voyage through the living, pulsating channels and orifices of her own body. Unlike Mona Hatoum who used techniques of endoscopic photography most closely associated with surgery to show the inside of her own body, Annette Messenger

has rejected the technological devices of the time to focus on form and composition in addition to playing with scale.

In *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*¹³⁸

Susan Stewart addresses the relations of language to experience, the body to scale, and narratives to objects. She looks at the miniature as a metaphor for interiority and at the gigantic as an exaggeration of aspects of the exterior. According to the author “exaggeration is not possible without scale and relativity.” By enlarging the size of the internal organs, Messenger uses scale to amplify the elements and to position the viewer in an inadequate posture.

The organs of *Penetration* are larger than life. Greatly magnified the scale of the interior body shifts from the known and felt proportions to those which are much larger than life. The proportions of the interior space are presented on a scale which results in a kind of claustrophobia, rendering the body at once knowable and estranged. Like the foetus which hangs inside the composition, the viewer experiences the installation as if inside the womb. Whether it be the experience of being inside the womb or one which reminds the viewer of his experiencing the world as an infant, he and/or she is faced with a sense of self which he and/or she is not customary, where everything is new, larger than life, fascinating yet perhaps simultaneously intimidating.

¹³⁸ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993)

Messenger's way of displaying the organs calls to mind Man Ray's *Anatomies* of 1930 (Fig.44), in which one is involved with the proximity of low-angle shots, where the aim was to re-examine the conventional view of the human body and to reveal astonishing aspects of imperfection which are undetectable to the naked eye. Like Man Ray's work which looked at reworking the standard view of the human body, Messenger's aesthetic approach reworks the consensus - medical, aesthetical and cultural - while confusing the viewer. Constructed around plays in scale *Penetration* revisits the experience of human anatomy.

Messenger does not place herself at the center of the composition as she had done in previous works. Her biological construction suggests a universal experience rather than a conventional identification with physicality. Like Mona Hatoum she invites the visitor to make his or her way inside the human body. However, unlike Hatoum, the body is generic. Anthropologist, David Le Breton states "contemporary medical imaging extends the body-man dualism"¹³⁹ and achieves a tremendous fragmentation of the body by isolating the organs, the functions, even the cells or the molecules, which leads the subject disappear. At a time where the organ's physiology is visually accessible through technology Messenger chooses to use more traditional artistic methods to enable the viewer's access. Through installation art Messenger penetrates the body and allows the viewer to reconstruct the body and transcend technological limitations and the mind-body dualism. As an outcome of Messenger's artistic choice, the viewer who is closely implicated in the work participates in its construction. Upon entering the work the spectator/actor comes across fragments of his or her body, reproduced, amassed,

¹³⁹ André Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France), 208.

collected, that come together and intensify each other. Viewers are subjected to a state of complete absorption and empathy, precisely because they are now situated within the body, and not just outside of it. There is a taxonomic process of rationalization exposed in *Penetration* which involves seeing and feeling what can normally not be seen nor touched - point which will be meticulously discussed "Touching the Parts." By cutting into the space of the body, Messenger penetrates it and re-orders and re-organizes it.

Once the apprehension of entering the installation has been overcome and the decision to enter the work has been made, *Penetration* can be read perhaps as a place for experimentation where no prejudice is made upon the viewer's decision to enter the construction or not. However, *Penetration* generates a dramatic sense of identity where upon penetrating the installation the participant questions his or her own sense of embodiment. With the installation piece Messenger's bodily construction is an inquiry into what it means to have a body as well as what it means to be a body. In addition, with *Penetration* the artist demonstrates the capacity to examine one's relationship to our own sense of embodiment.

Once penetrated, the density of both the work and the body changes. What the viewer feels once inside the work is quite subjective. He may perhaps find relief (having entered a "womb like" room made of colourful textile objects) or maybe feel discomfort and anxiety (because he or she knows he or she is being observed by those viewers who choose to stay outside of it.)

As a result, although Messenger's body surprises the viewer, since it has been opened up in a creative way, the space created is innovative and an intellectual playground as it allows the viewer to question, fantasize and philosophy about the body. Provocative, the work falls between fiction and reality and it generates an array of reactions in its viewers: laughter, intrigue, shock, disgust... *Penetration* is Messenger's vehicle to question the human body and our relationship to it.

However, although the work stimulates it also expresses a poetic of loss. Built on memory, *Penetration* reminds us of our childhood where the "accrochage" (the thread suspension) evokes a children's mobile. It also recalls our biology classes and textbooks. Thanks to her use of material as well as her choice of colours, Messenger allows the viewer to plunge into a whimsical world, where everything that appears obvious and simple, is not.

Penetration is unprecedented in its physical, mental, emotional and esoteric exposure to the human body. As such, it represents a progressive step in the history of anatomical and medical representation.



Plate 40.

Richard Serra

Saint-John's Rotary Arc

1980

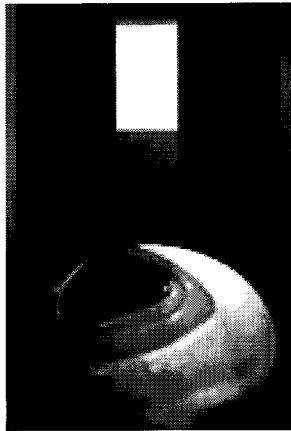


Plate 41.

Mona Hatoum

Foreign Body (Corps Étranger)

1994

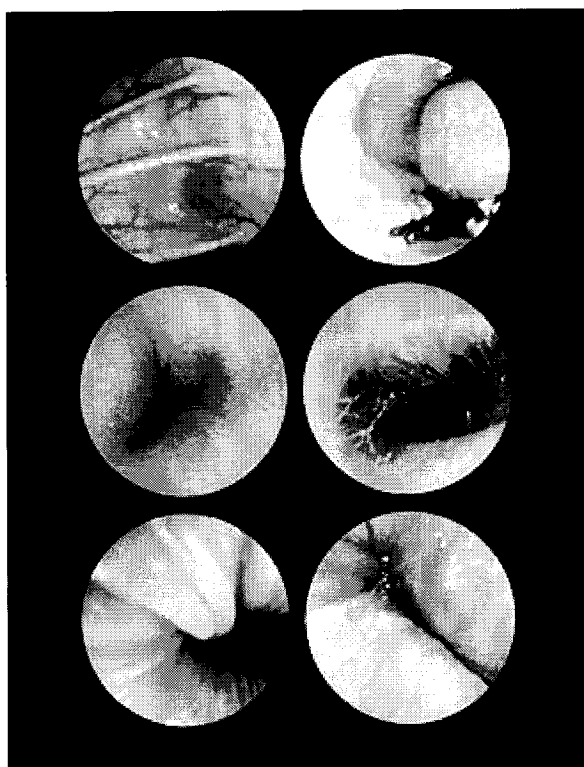


Plate 42.

Mona Hatoum

Foreign Body

Detail

Video – Endoscopy

1994

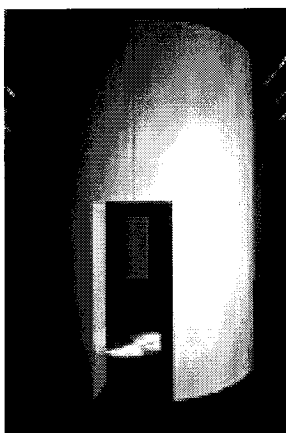


Plate 43.

Mona Hatoum

Foreign Body (Corps Étranger)

1994



Plate 44.

Man Ray

Anatomies

1930

CHAPTER III.

Penetration and the History of Spectatorship in Visual Art

With *Penetration* Annette Messenger demonstrates the centrality of the “body” inside her work, within Art History and in contemporary thought. At the simplest level *Penetration* can be taken as a signifier of the context in which the functioning of the human body is envisioned by the artist. Operating a clinical autopsy of the human body Messenger tells the tale of its interior by stripping it of its steadiness to the point where its integrity is threatened. The viewer is taken on a tour under the skin, through familiar - or not - yet fascinating forms.

However, Messenger is not the first and only artist to place the body at the centre of her (their) work. In this section, I will argue that although Messenger’s representation is an original and innovative piece it belongs to a long history. Resembling what she usually does in her art, with *Penetration*, Messenger draws on a vast repertoire of sources and stimuli that have permeated her life and work to varying degrees. However, specific elements from past Art History inform this very personal composition. Here, I will demonstrate how the artist makes clear references to the recent past and additionally how *Penetration* operates within a contemporary community of ideas.

Although the body has been the principal subject of Western art since the Renaissance, currently it is also understood as being the central locus and metaphor for distinguishing and exploring political, economical, social and cultural changes. The contemporary period may be characterized as having an understanding that the body is mutable, incomplete and altogether human. Today, this alarming feeling of instability has led to numerous efforts to control the development of the physical body by promoting certain physical characteristics at the expense of others. Consequently, the body continues to stir passions, cause controversy and compel interest at all levels of society. I will demonstrate how today various artists are showing resurgent interest in anatomy and are making it once again a vibrant and relevant area of image making and manipulation. Artists such as Mona Hatoum, Kiki Smith, Louise Bourgeois, Damien Hirst and Annette Messenger (among others) trespass once more the frontier between science and art by appropriating the visual styles and medical language and by showing their works to non-medical audiences in art galleries. Annette Messenger's *Penetration* is a significant example of this current. In this section, I have chosen to focus on contemporary artists who bring out aspects of Messenger's concern about the body and particularly those who question spectatorship, anatomy, its discourse and embodiment.

1) Modernism

By the end of the 1960s, like many of her contemporaries, Annette Messenger broke away from high art conventions. In Paris, this was a time of student rebellion and great

disorientation where all universal values were brought into question and defiant practices were intuitively adopted which defied modernism's utopianism, humanism and rationalism. While students and workers voiced their resentment and frustration, many young artists approached the institution of art with equivalent contempt and questioned the accepted premises of art as they attempted to redefine its meaning and function. This is the era within which Messenger started developing her style while concurrently looking into specific elements of the past for responses to her particular interrogations about spectatorship.

a) Space

The most characteristic of Messenger's practices is her unwillingness to respect traditional boundary lines between the artist, the art object, and the gallery space. As a pioneer of the movement that led to installation art, Joseph Beuys was a significant inspiration in Messenger's growth as an artist. "I met and exhibited with Joseph Beuys in the 1976, and with Marcel Broodthaers"¹⁴⁰ she acknowledged to Robert Storr. Beuys wanted to awaken the public and shake people out of their routines: "...I not only want to stimulate people, I want to provoke them"¹⁴¹ so he encouraged a new attitude by regarding our former preconceptions, our assumptions in looking at art, at the museum and gallery visit. Beuys's art objects and performances weren't about entertaining an audience - although they did - but rather were about challenging the public and the institutions.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Robert Storr, *Annette Messenger. Faire Parade 1971-95* (Paris : ARC Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 23 Mars - 21 Mai 1995), 108.

¹⁴¹ Heiner Bastian and Jeannot Simmen, "Interview with Joseph Beuys," in the catalog of the Rotterdam exhibition, *Drawings* (Berlin: National Gallerie and Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen 1970-1980), 93-94.

Self-proclaimed shaman, Beuys saw himself as a modern mediator that intervened between the earthly and spiritual worlds: a political activist who healed through teaching and who believed that art should effectively transform people's everyday lives. Like Annette Messager who took on various personas (*Annette Messager Collector - Collectionneuse*, *Annette Messager Practical Woman - Femme Pratique*, *Annette Messager Trickster - Truqueuse*, *Annette Messager Artist - Artiste* and *Annette Messager Peddler - Colporteuse*) Joseph Beuys took on many characters. One of the many roles he assigned himself was that of healer, and he often spoke of the substantial social wound that needed repair. As PhD student in cultural history at the University of Minnesota Amy Levine discusses "his art offered both poetic representations of the injury and practical prescriptions for a cure (see Political Activism guide), and alludes to healing techniques of all kinds, both physical and spiritual: Western medicine (salves of sulphur, gauze and adhesive bandages, x-rays), homeopathy and natural cures (copper, herbs), the Christian notion of suffering, redemption, and rebirth (motifs of the cross, baptism), and the ecstatic, mystical activities of the shaman, who serves as a channel for the flow of energy between the earthly and spiritual realms."¹⁴² Through his creations, Beuys was making a statement about the state of Western culture. However, since his work was clearly grounded in sociality, I presume that he must have been thinking about and commenting on Germany's devastation following World War II.

¹⁴² Amy Levine, "Medicine and Healing," Joseph Beuys, Walker Art Center (online article) <http://www.walkerartorg/beuys/gg13.html>

With *Show Your Wound* (1977) (Fig. 45-47), Joseph Beuys assembled one of his most tragic environments in an underground pedestrian area between two streets in Munich (between Maximilianstrasse and Altstadttring.) As critique, Caroline Tisdall argues “the concrete desolation of such a place gave it the connotation of a sick spot in the urban environment, as the site selected a year later for *Tallow* in Münster another wound inflicted by the abstraction of modern planning.”¹⁴³ Through this site specific work, Beuys illustrated the individual and collective affliction and suggested the isolation of the contemporary human condition. *Show Your Wound* was a death piece, a memento mori which combined five double objects.

It was made of two apparatuses (with wooden shafts and wrought-iron blades, bearing *Brown Cross*, and *Mainstream* stamps, leaning with blades together against a two-part, white-painted wooden board on the wall), two school blackboards (on which *Show your Wound* has been chalked), two old mortuary tables from a pathology lab, together with two lamps (made from: two galvanized iron boxes, each fronted with a glass pane smeared inside with fat; two galvanized iron chests filled with fat and each fitted with a clinical thermometer and a test tube containing the skull of a thrush; and two preserving jars covered by gauze filters), two wooden-handled iron forks (each with a colored fabric tied around it and each standing on a slate tablet on which a semicircle has been scratched) and two copies of the Italian left-wing paper *La Lotta continua* (The Ongoing Struggle) addressed to Beuys.

¹⁴³ Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 214.

What I understand Joseph Beuys was suggesting in the binary composition was the dualities of art as tool and as wound. His combination of medical gear, conventional objects and mixed materials demonstrated his approach to impact the world, since “Art is,” he said, “a genuinely human medium for revolutionary change in the sense of completing the transformation from a sick world to a healthy one.”¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, with this work, Beuys was simultaneously alluding to Christ’s display of his stigmata and the image of a hospital radiograph used in World War II. As a result, Beuys was linking the spiritual world to contemporary reality.

I believe that for Annette Messager, the figure of the shaman is a crucial image. Unlike Beuys, Messager doesn’t take upon herself to act as a go-between for the physical and spiritual realms, and doesn’t assume to have particular powers such as prophecy and healing. However, as a “modern witch and salamander-like woman”¹⁴⁵ she considers herself as having magical and wonder-working powers. By salamander-like woman Metken means that Messager can figuratively brave fire and as such it can be said she has special powers.

Earlier works, like the *Chimaeras* (Chimères, 1982-1984) (Fig. 48-50) include a sense of magic. By definition, chimaeras are imaginary hybrid creatures that are most often given a female personality or identity. Messager used photography to replicate and to displace

¹⁴⁴ Joseph Beuys quoted in *Quartetto*, Exhibition Catalogue (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1984), 106.

¹⁴⁵ Sigrid Metken, « Profane Ex-Votos » in *Annette Messager, Comédie-Tragédie, 1971-1989* (Grenoble: Musée de Grenoble, 16 Décembre 1989-12 Février 1990), 154.

the subject as large photographic composites took the shapes of monsters. The group of fantastic forms, which were combined to represent witches, bats, huge spiders, etc. and oversized objects such as scissors and keys appeared to menace each other onto the walls. More fascinating than the images are the media used to convey them. Messenger's combination of painting and photography represented an event unique on the contemporary scene of the time. Too light to be regarded as sculpture these shapes constituted a new type of object. Messenger, who always valued the transformative qualities of photography, acknowledged its magical and fetishizing qualities and with this series where both subject and medium assumed a supernatural and mysterious feeling. I believe Messenger created a new type of unhinged view of the human body by systematically deforming the photographs (of grimaces, distorted poses, body-parts...) which she projected onto convex surfaces and painted over in bright colors. With the 1986 Vancouver Art Gallery installation¹⁴⁶, Messenger's topography transported the viewer into a world of hybrid figures: inside her own artistic and conceptual web. Accordingly, while indicating the advent of a kind of nostalgia - in all her creations I believe Messenger interprets an invented and fantastic world that is within everyone's reach given that she exploits the dreamlike world of fairy tales - *Chimaeras* already affirm the body as a valid art material.

In *Penetration*, the sense of magic and mystery is brought into existence as well. I consider Messenger manipulates and transforms the human body in order to comment on and illustrate the power and magic of being human and of being "alive." Once again,

¹⁴⁶ *Luxe, calme et volupté - Aspects of French Art 1966-1986* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, Expo' 86, French Pavilion)

Messenger constructs an atmosphere in which the viewer's sensation of space is determined by the particular environment in which the artwork is set. By fragmenting the human body and by enveloping the viewer inside the composition, Messenger explores the body (the two bodies: the constructed body and the performer's body) as an element in space: both metaphorically and theoretically. *Penetration* shows a re-structured "body" while simultaneously changing the viewer's perception of his or her own physical space. As such, I consider *Penetration* imposes an uncomfortable and self-conscious state on the audience in an attempt to reduce the gap between audience and performer (participant). And I believe that it is as such that Messenger brings forth concerns surrounding the mystery of the body and embodiment.

Since most of Joseph Beuys's oeuvre was aimed at dissolving the distinction between art and life and as he never ceased to emphasize the act of art or to conceive of art itself as an action I consider that it is in transformation that Beuys wanted to bring about the ultimate unity between art and life. Consequently, change was a constant for him. Indeed, most of his pieces changed through time, relying on materials that decay, ferment, dry up or change color. Since life is in a constant state of flux, he reasoned, art - in order to bring it closer to life - must be similarly ephemeral. Beuys selected materials with properties analogous to processes of both natural and artificial worlds. For Beuys, the material became part of the idea. Like Beuys, who chose felt as one of his chief materials because of its capacity for transformation through absorption of its environment, Messenger uses felt inside *Penetration*. Consequently, the use of felt connects the work of both artists and links *Penetration* to the notion of transformation. (This notion will be discussed

thoroughly later in this chapter.) In addition, since Annette Messenger's art practice revolves around the act of collecting (the practice of evolution and transformation par excellence) both artists can be coupled for operating in a similar disposition on another level.

Since the practice of collecting means to gather and gradually accumulate in a place - forever pushing back the frontiers of completeness - it is subsequently a way to stop time. Messenger believes that even when a collection grows it does not age but rather becomes more beautiful. Because a collection is endless "collecting is reassuring, limitless - until death comes along, just as an object reused and reproduced."¹⁴⁷ With *Penetration*, Messenger does not however repeat images like in earlier photographic works, but rather accumulates objects (realistic replicas of the internal body) and creates intimate arrangements which vary according to the space in which they are shown. Customarily, Messenger's compositions progress and transform in time in view of the fact that the artist modifies them from exhibition to exhibition, and even fuses elements from various series and reworks the whole according to her current point of view. Consequently, I understand that transience is experienced at various levels in *Penetration*.

In *Penetration*, Messenger invites us to infiltrate the body via her articulation of installation art. Since it demonstrates little respect for established conventions, installation art is a hybrid art form and a way of making art that responds to the contemporary order. In Installation Art the experience of space is fundamental and the

¹⁴⁷ Robert Storr, Interview with Annette Messenger in *Annette Messenger, Faire Parade 1971-1995*, id., 102.

location of the installation defines its meaning. In mapping a gallery space Messenger establishes that the environment exists as an integral work of art. The gallery turns into a self-contained space that reinforces the singular and insular aesthetic of *Penetration* where the unity of the components becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Although *Penetration* was first presented in the Monika Sprüth Gallery, Cologne, it is not site specific and its planning and preparation are renegotiated for each new site. Consequently, because of its dependence on the site, the installation process becomes a performance that is replayed as the artist (normally) returns to work with the piece, repeatedly renewing it.¹⁴⁸

Installation Art allows the viewer to connect with the world because the piece must be experienced bodily. Since it is an art form that goes beyond the visual as it engages other senses, it is regarded as an art of connections which is experienced as a whole. In addition, because sensation is the data for immediate awareness, the experience of time inside installation art is real. The installation is a place where viewers are invited to walk through unfamiliar territory in which every point is related to a new level of awareness, and possibly vulnerability. Once viewers enter *Penetration*, they may experience utter horror, complete incomprehension, discomfort, and a desire to get out as soon as possible. In our contemporary technological world, *Penetration* reassures by way of its direct and essential experience. Yet simultaneously, the oversized body parts make the physical dimensions of the viewer's body appear diminutive and in that sense it may perhaps shock the visitor. Accordingly, *Penetration* becomes an arena for personal

¹⁴⁸ The idea that *Penetration* should be understood as a performance as well as an installation piece has been discussed and will be further developed in this chapter.

performance where the viewer is implicated in the three-dimensional space, within the work of art as a participant, and where he or she becomes acutely aware of his or her body.

Although Installation Art became one of the favoured art form of the 1990s, it has earlier precedents, having appeared in the late 1960s. With *Penetration* Annette Messager explicitly cites the Brazilian artist, Jesús Rafael Soto. In 1969, for his Paris exhibition, Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, Jesús Rafael Soto transformed the whole courtyard outside the Museum into the *Penetrable*. Thousands of plastic threads were openly hung down in the space thickening it into a dense medium. The work could be entered from any direction and the threads were affected as a group by the wind as well as by the viewers who stood inside it and/or crossed back and forth through the dangling filaments. With this work, the kind of diffusion which was explored earlier in Soto's paintings became an enveloping experience, and, in a significant sense, a "communal" experience.

For Soto, this was an artistic breakthrough. Until the end of the fifties what made Soto's work unique was the ambiguity of real and imaginary as an optical experience, seen by a detached viewer. With *Penetrable*¹⁴⁹ Soto combined visual and palpable elements into a new form-language where the ambiguity of the work shifted as the piece involved the observer's whole body. The composition affected one's encounters with other people and it happened in public space. As curator Thomas M. Messer asserts in *Soto: A*

¹⁴⁹ A term first used by, the Brazilian artist, Helio Oiticica in 1960 to describe his labyrinths and sensory cabins which were to be occupied and entered by the spectator.

Retrospective Exhibition, “the prime experience in Soto’s later works is no longer optical but tactile and sonorous as the human participant through his act of penetration, agitates not only the real space before him but also our aural ambience.”¹⁵⁰ In the same review he continues and contends “...Soto has transformed the spectator outside the object to a central agent within the work itself; and reduced or radically altered the distance between art produced and consumed.”¹⁵¹

Although Messenger never indicated that she directly came into contact with Soto’s installation piece it is cautious to say that since the artist was living and working in Paris at the time of the work’s showing she may have seen and experienced the work or in any case she may have been informed about the work. The reference to Soto’s *Penetrable* is evident in more than one instance. Like Soto, Messenger hangs her elements from a top grid, positions the parts in a way that the viewer comes into contact with them, uses the environment to modify the overall experience and encourages the viewer to enter the installation. Along with the allusion made to the artist’s overall composition, Soto’s title is also quoted.

Installation Art is all encompassing and establishes the viewer as a participant. Although it overturns the traditional form of theatre to which we are familiar today, since it offers multiple view-points, Annette Messenger quotes and adapts a unique genre of theatre that originated in the Eastern world: the shadow theatres. In traditional theatre, since the

¹⁵⁰ Thomas M. Messer, Preface, in *Soto: A Retrospective Exhibition*, (New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum 1974) 7.

¹⁵¹ Thomas M. Messer, Preface, in *Soto: A Retrospective Exhibition*, id., 7

advance brought on by the Renaissance (proscenium stage) the illusion of reality depends upon the convention of single-point perspective - the view of an immobile spectator - which allows for a visual picture frame (box set). With *Penetration*, the viewer is not solely positioned as an observer. He or she becomes the actor that sets the work into motion. Established by Messenger as a major actor within the work, it is interesting to see that the viewer simultaneously becomes a shadow onto the gallery walls.

Shadows always depend on the light and on the presence of a three-dimensional existence, which may be animate or not. The majority of us can't recall the number of times we played with our shadow, trying to chase it, to go over it, or again remember when we stopped walking, in order not to step on it or even the instances when we hid ourselves from the light so it would stop following us. The falling of the shadow and the change of its dimensions, according to the position of the sun withholds magic that has been intriguing people since the beginning of times. In some countries of Africa, noon is the most demoniac time because the sun is almost vertical and the shadows disappear almost perfectly. Many religions have given religious meaning to the shadow. The kingdom of shadows is even, in certain cases, synonym to the kingdom of the dead and the dead are also called "shadows of the past" by some.

In art, the painting's subject is paramount while shadows are incidental. Shadows are pictorial ephemera and it is only since the Renaissance that shadows have been portrayed systematically in art. In a "Short History of the Shadow"¹⁵² Victor Stoichita examines the historical and symbolic significance of shadows. He opens his book with the shadows in

¹⁵² Victor Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*, London : Reaktion Books, 1997.

Plato's cave and with Pliny's assertion that painting began by tracing silhouettes. He then moves through and beyond the Renaissance to conclude with a brief account of the use of shadows in twentieth century art.

Although the existence of the shadow is as old as the birth of the sun, today, the electric lamp also plays a role in their continuation. Inside *Penetration* I believe the organs, hung from the ceiling with angora wool, lit with bare bulbs and reflected onto the walls of the gallery space, evoke the puppets of the Shadow Theatres.

The Shadow Theatre has old roots, and its origin is lost in the depth of the centuries. Puppets were the main characters of such performances and since puppets, have been an all-time favourite toy of both children and adults they come in many sizes, shapes, and varieties. Early shadow puppets were probably silhouettes set in motion by the firelight against the sides of nomads tents. Then puppets acquired limbs, to become movable rod puppets, and eventually they acquired strings to become marionettes.

However, in the Shadow Theatre, actors create the reality on stage. As storytellers getting the audience involved in the show, they are the performers, technicians, and even the artists of the plays. While Messenger is the director and the architect of *Penetration*, the viewer is the actor inside the work. Because of the lighting, the viewer-participant's shadows also play on the walls. Accordingly, the visitors' bodies become the shadows that complete the work.

Breaking with high art conventions by way of Installation Art and by the incorporation of light and shadows as central components of the work, I believe Annette Messenger creates a piece that breaks free from the conventional representation of the anatomical body.

b) Fragmentation

In accordance with Messenger's refusal to give into the rational process of art making, Surrealism was seen as an exemplary oppositional practice and was chosen by the artist as a central revolutionary strategy. And as curator and author Kate Davidson states, the artist draws on "the Surrealist' philosophy to awaken a place in our subconscious."¹⁵³ As the artist disclosed in 1995, her work is a direct citation of the Surrealists. Messenger rejected conventional modernisms and, in her investigation of practices, she undertook a critical rethinking of the avant-garde project of this group. "I know being a Surrealist is not in vogue in France today. However, I do see my work yes, as bric-a-brac, a Surrealist hodgepodge. I love Man Ray photographs and the work of a relatively unknown Surrealist woman artist, Claude Cahun, who did remarkable photographs on her own body. Molinier is also very important for me and Boiffard who did big close-up shots."¹⁵⁴ The correspondence between Messenger's work and that of the artists she cites resides in the recognition that the refiguring of desire has revolutionary potential. As a means for achieving the goals of Surrealism, photography surpassed painting because it presented, an indexical presence of some original rather than a reasoned representation of it.

¹⁵³ Kate Davidson, "Annette Messenger. Penetration" in Kate Davidson and Michael Desmond, *Islands: Contemporary Installations from Australia, Asia, Europe and America* (National Gallery of Australia, 1996), 56.

¹⁵⁴ Natasha Leoff, Interview with Annette Messenger, *Journal of Contemporary Art Online*, 1995.

Consequently, when dealing with the human body, Messenger first followed the Surrealists into photography.

Bordering on the Surrealists in her photographic works, Annette Messenger dismembers the body. She also refers to rituals and to the unconscious, Fantasies, obsessions and dreams find a place in her fabrications. In the 1980s, she utilized photography in her approach to the theme of corporeality. Her practice related to a specific methodology: she framed, classified, arranged and composed entities/bodies that did not exist or rather that were in the process of existing. She split up faces and bodies in a surprising manner and her photographic fragments did not epitomize one rigid or critical viewpoint, but rather attempted a re-construction in which each carnal detail became a clue and revealed unsuspected insights.

In the early 1980s her photographic works - *My Vows*, *My Works...* - started to include a signature motif (the 'superimposition' of small black-and-white pictures framed under glass.) These works which demonstrated Messenger's 'specific' contemporary artistic practice, where her use of these photographs which displayed all sorts of body parts (feet, hands, nipples, nose, mouth, eyes, etc. male and female, big and little, eroticized and disdained) entailed a correspondence between the pieces as the works mirrored, reflected and informed one another without nevertheless creating a visual totality (since each work was autonomous and different from the next.)

The photographic process revealed new realities. Through photography, Annette Messager indicated her uneasiness with the idea of totality, which to her signified the 'end of something', i.e. death. Photography occasioned and still occasions a reductive way of dealing with the world or rather a certain patronizing of reality that is summed up in an array of casual fragments. From being 'out there' the world/body came to be 'inside' photographs and from being whole, it was now being fragmented.

Although Messager fragments her bodies she does so as a female subject and thus she articulates her own pleasures and desires. Like Claude Cahun, one of the few female Surrealists, Annette Messager uses fragmented body parts that she classifies and re-arranges to interpret what the body is in her own personal artistic language. However, unlike Cahun, whose montages were customarily based on self-portraits, Messager's compositions and particularly *Penetration* - although significantly autobiographical - do not depend on the artist's own body.

Contemporary of Cahun, Hans Bellmer, who also used fragmentation as a strategy, needs mentioning. Bellmer created several dolls with fragmented bodies that could be dismantled and arranged in various configurations. He created sexualized images of the female body - distorted, dismembered, or menaced in sinister scenarios where his concerns were with the fetishising of body parts and fragmentation of the sexual form. Using a narrative format, he then photographed the dolls in a range of grotesque - often sexual - positions. The images he conveyed were of death and decay, abuse and longing.

Annette Messenger breaks from the Surrealists by refusing the position of cipher and by resisting the position of desire through the female: the objectification of the female body that is produced by the male gaze.

c) Form

Messenger was directly influenced by the European tradition - and particularly by the French heritage - but American artists also played a significant role in the evolution of the artist's work. The American artists of the 1950s and 1960s directly influenced her as she was herself becoming an artist. As she asserted in 1995: "Strangely enough, when I saw Sol LeWitt's wall drawings at MoMA, they really affected me: the simple means, a trace of pencil repeated on the walls ... His influence came out much later in my work. Just like Warhol's influence. What impressed me with LeWitt's work was the economy of means because what I usually respond badly to in American art is a surplus of materials, of means. What I look for is a domestic economy or in other terms, an economy of means."¹⁵⁵

This "economy of means", whether it be domestic or otherwise also systematizes *Penetration*. While the body represented is a concept, the internal organs are realistic. The materials, forms and even colours are candid, straightforward and the representations they give rise to are convincing. Another way Messenger turns her back on dominant art practices is by way of the traditional crafts and the materials she employs which make a clear reference to the feminine. Although traditional crafts have often figured in her work

¹⁵⁵ Natasha Leoff, Interview with Annette Messenger, id.

(the link made between Annette Messenger and art done by Women will be discussed subsequently in the dissertation) inside *Penetration* the objects are roughly stitched and hang casually from angora threads and as such do not noticeably evoke the assurance and polish of traditional needlework. However, the organs are undoubtedly recognizable and simple in their forms. Like recent editions of Gray's *Anatomy* that emphasize the significance of colour and technological developments in representations of body parts (for example, resin casts of the human kidney employ a range of colours to outline the aorta, renal arteries and their branches) and the medical models found in medical offices, Annette Messenger also uses the generic anatomical model for her depiction such that the internal organs appear realistic and imitate scientific consensus.

2) Postmodernism

Fascination with the infinite possibilities of the body is radically demonstrated by artists like Mona Hatoum, Kiki Smith, Christian Boltanski, Louise Bourgeois, Damien Hirst and Jana Sterbak (only to mention a few) in topics such as: medical imagery, anatomy and fragmentation, part-object, light, transformation and decay...

We cannot visit and anatomize *Penetration* without considering the contemporary models and the current ideas which coexist with concepts that are related to the body and embodiment. As I have discussed previously Messenger's composition is unequivocally linked to medical imagery and her representation of the "internal" body is evidently

derived from scientific research and consensus. *Penetration* takes us deep into the human body through familiar yet peculiar forms which hang from the ceiling. As a result of the diagrammatic quality of the work this tour under the skin recalls biology lessons and our childhood class books. Owing to her use of the medical vocabulary Messenger penetrates our collective memory.

a) Examination

Today, various artists show an interest in the human body and especially in the various structures that make up the human organism, in ways that involve the scientific discourse and that relate to Annette Messager's installation piece.

Damien Hirst who is deemed an initiator, a unifying force and the figure in the forefront of a new generation of British artists, who aroused great international attention under the sobriquet YBA (Young British Artists) or Brit Pack, is also concerned with the human body: its pleasures, functions, and composition. Best known for the controversy that arose around his tank series which contained dead animals in formaldehyde and for his understanding of life through death, Hirst is concerned with the human body and anatomy.

His recent sculpture, *Hymn* (the centerpiece of Ant Noises at the Saatchi Gallery and Hirst's 2000 New York show at the Gagosian Gallery) (Fig. 51-53) a 20 feet-high anatomical model of the human body, made of polychrome bronze and weighing six tons, which monumentalizes the body, is a valuable example which illustrates the artist's

concern with the human anatomical body. To make it, Hirst simply took a Humbrol plastic toy and handed it over to a bronze foundry with instructions to scale it up and cast it. *Hymn* shows a young man who has been split open in the middle, so that the left side of his face, shoulder, back, buttock and leg are smooth flesh while the skin has been removed from the right side of his torso, chest and stomach area to reveal the soft muscles, tendons, organs, and soft tissues underneath. Instead of casting the toy model in plastic Hirst chose bronze.

Although the bust evokes, in its shape and colors, the plastic detachable medical models that medical students use to learn anatomy, because it is made of bronze *Hymn* looks more like a modern day Kouros¹⁵⁶ figure. The fact that the bronze is painted (as opposed to patinated) makes it the first polychromed bronze since antiquity, and therefore a unique piece in the art of the past 2 000 years. However, one major difference exists between the Kouros and Hirst's statue which actually results in the artist's use of the anatomical model. Because of this citation Hirst was able to show both the exterior and interior of the figure simultaneously, contrasting the bland carapace of flesh with the polychrome organs it contains. From the front, the viewer quickly discovers that the two sides of the figure are bordering each other yet irreconcilable. However, because of the work's scale and presentation when the viewer's eye focuses on the flesh, he or she doesn't see the insides. Similarly, when he or she looks at the entrails, the skin becomes mentally blocked out.

¹⁵⁶ A Kouros is a sculpture of a nude athlete or god found in Greek art of the Archaic Period, circa 620-500 BC.

Here, Hirst uses the medical expertise to convey a message about our bodies and ourselves. Like Messenger had previously done, in the mid 1990s with *Penetration*, Hirst - who saw in the toy a metaphor for the dichotomy between the animal and the spiritual in man - evokes medical imagery and scale to confront the viewer with his own sense of embodiment. Rising up to the rafters of the gallery, this enormous statue makes the visitors look like pygmies around the base of some primitive idol. As such *Hymn* can be understood as a divinity for the 21st century and with his statue Hirst seems to be saying - and reiterating what Messenger had previously implied - that all we have to worship is ourselves, frail and imperfect as we are.

The idea suggested in *Penetration* is similar since Annette Messenger implies that although our insides are “disgusting”¹⁵⁷ we shouldn’t dread but rather salute them given that they allow us to know ourselves. In 1999, the artist gave a statement to Magali Nachtergaele in *Les Inrockuptibles* which illustrates this later point quite vividly:

« [dessinez, fabriquez des organes] Oh, c’est comme dessiner une forêt... ce qui est bien, c’est que ça, on l’a tous, et c’est quand même dégueulasse tout ce qu’on a à l’intérieur ! Les intestins que j’ai fait je voulais qu’ils ressemblent à des coussins, à des poupées. Les organes suspendus c’était la maternité, un fœtus qui ressemblait à une poupée. Il faut garder une distance, ça reste de l’ordre de l’imaginaire. Ce qui m’intéresse c’est un fantastique qui est là, en nous, pas le fantastique lointain, ce qui m’intéresse, c’est nous-même. »¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ In Annette Messenger’s words. From Magali Nachtergaele. “Annette Messenger. Ton univers impitoyable” in *Numéro des lecteurs des Inrockuptibles*, 22 décembre 1999(online article)

¹⁵⁸ Magali Nachtergaele. “Annette Messenger. Ton univers impitoyable,” id.

With *Penetration*, Annette Messenger brings together traditional female crafts, medical imagery and the viewer's participation with the intention of creating a sensorial experience while concurrently fostering introspection - her own as well as the viewers'. Consequently, Messenger goes a step beyond Hirst since by way of questioning notions of boundary (boundaries which exist between inside and outside, between one person and another...); she creates a composition that asks to be experienced with most of our senses (above all sight and touch) and our entire body.

Since the beginning of its history medicine's desire to know has always been supported by a desire to see. The scientific emphasis on sight¹⁵⁹ resulted in overcoming the invisibility of the body and the recording of its images, leaving nothing unidentified. This search for transparency opened the human body to a number of visibilities, unveiling it in a macabre stripping. From the anatomized body of Vesalius to the new technologies of medical imagery, the management of the representation of the body has followed the path of a sanitization of the image. In a world where change has become the norm, where rapid and dramatic shifts in technology occur every year, it seems inevitable that the body and its representation must change as well. Consequently, contemporary changes in attitudes to the senses, death and reproduction can all be set in the context of the increasing medicalization of the body.

Ever since the 1960s the panoply of medical imageries has multiplied its implications and has perfected its investigative tools as a result of the support of physics and computer

¹⁵⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in the Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 39.

science. Today, the medical body is virtually saturated with the mechanical and analytic “eyes” and different techniques have introduced the time factor inside the image allowing us to follow in actual time, on a television screen, after computer processing, the path of a probe or a dye inside the body.

Capturing the body in all its details and particularities has always been a concern of the artists. In our technological era it is thus not surprising to see that several contemporary artists use these advances and implicate themselves with clinical procedures for instance in order to capture the body in ways that were not available to them before. Mona Hatoum’s *Foreign Body* is a useful example as it is closely associated with surgery. The video maps an internal and external self-portrait of the artist through such complex medical procedures as endoscopy, colonoscopy, and echography (ultrasound.)

Although the work feels like a public violation of the artist’s body in which the viewer is the “foreign body” whose entrance into the womblike chamber becomes an act of penetration, the close-up (video) shows the viewer how the artist’s body is the same as everyone else’s. Consequently, like Messenger’s *Penetration*, *Foreign Body* can be compared to an *écorché* figure (to an illustration of a human body from which the skin has been removed to expose the internal organs.)

Although Messenger does not place herself at the center of the composition since her biological construction suggests a universal experience rather than a conventional identification with physicality, like Mona Hatoum she invites the visitor to make his or

her way inside the human body. However, at a time where the organ's physiology is visually accessible through technology Messenger chooses to use more traditional artistic methods such as Installation art, crafts... to enable the viewer's access. Because contemporary medical imaging extends the body-man dualism¹⁶⁰ and achieves a tremendous fragmentation of the body by isolating the organs, the functions, even the cells or the molecules the subject disappears under the biological constraint that substitutes it, Messenger has decided on installation art to penetrate and access the body. As a consequence of this artistic choice the viewer who is closely implicated in the work participates in its construction. Upon entering the composition the spectator comes across fragments of his or her body, reproduced, amassed, collected, that come together and intensify each other. Since the body is fragmented and as a result of the proximity to the internal parts he or she becomes faced with his or her own sense of dismemberment, lack and loss.

b) Structure

What is most prominent in Messenger's work is the artist's use of truncated body parts, which are organized and re-assembled to create mutable and contingent identities. The body that is uncovered in *Penetration* is in pieces. Although the isolated organs hang side by side to make a homogenous composition the body which is represented is split open and divided.

¹⁶⁰ David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, id.

With the body fragmented, dismantled, the model loses its customary/established character, so that the spectator finds himself in the position of a voyeur, but a voyeur who views a familiar yet confusing construction. Consequently, while looking at the composition the spectator, who comes across fragments, of the masculine and feminine body, that have been collected and multiplied so that they merge and intensify each other, becomes aware of his or her own body.

Fragmentation does not however only invoke the suggestion of violence and disintegration that has been implied by Michel Foucault (ruptured social and symbolic fields) or by Jacques Lacan (*corps morcelé*, the psychic 'body in bits and pieces') since the body in parts does not always signify or exist as the body in pieces. If the body is understood as a sum of parts, each individual part, though singled out in a range of textual and iconographic spaces, always suggests a series of relations that exist with a normative, pathological or elusive whole or with the other (dominant or submissive, cooperative or uncooperative) parts and/or with the range of symbolic structures that are based on those relations.

Far beyond depicting the body in whole or in part, Louise Bourgeois' sculptures carry the body's direct and manifold imprint. Bourgeois, who started her career as an abstract painter and printmaker concentrated on sculpture in the late 1940s. For her, sculpture's physical proximity to the viewer and its confrontational quality made it the best medium through which to convey the complexities of human relationships and personal trauma. During the 1950s, she began to develop the themes which remain her central concern:

helplessness, fear, nurturing, sexuality, anger, rage and self-protection. Her works combine the specifically autobiographical - as she declared “For me, sculpture is the body. My body is my sculpture.”¹⁶¹ - in a broader cultural and psychological framework to achieve a unique balance of the representational and the abstract.

With her sculptures Louise Bourgeois conveys her fascination with the manipulation of the recognizable landscapes of our bodies. Extending her mannerist strategy of elongation and distortion, her sculptures are sometimes complex and unpredictable in their sudden shifts in anatomy. Sometimes, neither completely human, nor totally animal in their physiognomy, they display forms that are concerned with the physicality of flesh. Physicality of flesh is also present in *Penetration*.

As a unit *Eyes* (1982)¹⁶² (Fig. 54) suggests a bold abstract head, a female torso, or the symbolic marriage of woman to home and family. *Eyes* is a large marble sculpture that shows that the eye, a recurring motif in Surrealism, served as both a symbol for the act of perception and as an allusion to female sexual anatomy. On the edge of a massive marble block carved in various places to resemble a house (a persistent theme in Bourgeois' work) are two highly polished round balls with a chiselled circular opening at each center. Because of the combination of body parts and objects the sculpture both terrifies and delights.

¹⁶¹ Kotik Charlotta, “The Locus of Memory : An Introduction to the work of Louise Bourgeois” in *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 13. Bourgeois's statement was originally taken from “Louise Bourgeois, Self Expression is Sacred and Fatal” in Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall* (Zurich: Amman Verlag, 1992), 195.

¹⁶² Louis Bourgeois, *Eyes*, marble, 74 ¾ x 54 x 45 ¾ in. (189.9 x 137.2 x 116.2 cm), 1982.

In “Louise Bourgeois: Portrait of the Artist as Fillette,” Rosalind Krauss uses the concept of part-object to argue against earlier interpretations of Bourgeois that had placed her in the tradition of fragmented bodies. As such Louise Bourgeois was located inside the tradition which developed from Greco-Roman sculpture through Rodin and Brancusi. In that tradition, a sculpture of a body part is a “partial figure,” Bourgeois’s sculptures would be validated by its attachment to the “nineteenth-century romantic enthusiasm for the fragment.”¹⁶³ The part-object is, briefly, the notion that desire is best figured as the interaction of desiring organs and the parts they desire. The part-object has the advantage of being originally a “fragment”: not something abstracted or extracted from a previous wholeness, but a “machine” (in Deleuze and Guattari’s term), something in the real world unstrung from the controlling psyche. The part-object is part of Deleuze and Guattari’s anti-psychological orientation because it re-imagines the body as a series of desiring machines rather than a unified individual with a central psyche.

Besides Louise Bourgeois other contemporary artists focus on the body and its fragmentation. For instance, for the past fifteen years, the art of Kiki Smith has focused on the human body and its internal organic functions, fluids and secretions. For the past twenty years Smith has been exhibiting her multimedia works and exploring the body from inside to outside, constantly conflating the borders between the two. Ranging from fragments of the body to whole figures in the round, from the miniature to the monumental, from neutral or natural coloration to bright, unfamiliar hues, Smith’s works are united by their sensual impact and their frank acceptance of corporeal reality.

¹⁶³ Rosalind Krauss, “Louise Bourgeois: Portrait of the Artist as Fillette” in *Bachelors* (Boston: MIT Press, October Books, 1999), 54.

A Virgin Mary with flayed skin, a disembodied stomach, a wax figure with exposed muscles, a porcelain pelvis on a pedestal, truncated hands and feet are all part of her extensive repertoire. Upending paradigms of the classical figure and hierarchies of artistic materials with her use of glass, beads, paper and wax, Smith creates poignant and sometimes disturbing images.

As early as the 1970s the concern with the body and the skin as a protective but fragile, penetrable membrane - which is reflective of the paradox of our physical existence - surfaced in various of Smith's works and the artist's focus on the body and its functions started illustrating her defiance of the traditional distinctions between public and private subject matter. "You always have these boundaries in your daily life, but in your physical life as well. Skin is the surface, or boundary line, of the body's limit. The skin is actually this very porous membrane, so on a microscopic level you get into the question of what's inside and what's outside. Things are going through you all of the time (. . .) you just have the illusion of a wall between your insides and the outside."¹⁶⁴

Beginning to make drawings of microscopic images, cross sections and nerve endings from Henri Gray's *Anatomy* in 1979, following a period of training as an emergency medical technician in 1985 at the Brooklyn Hospital while continuing to pursue art at the New York Experimental Glass Workshop, Smith's art became focused on sculptures and drawings of individual internal organs or organic systems (*Untitled-Silver Heart*, 1986 and *Uro-Genital System-male and female*, 1986) (Fig. 55).

¹⁶⁴ Kiki Smith in Carlo McCormick, *Journal of Contemporary Art Online*, 1991.

Although her approach is full of respect for the complex functioning of the body, in her projects Smith usually questions the engagement with a complex, often disturbing sense of the integrity of the human body, for, in her works the human body is portrayed as whole, even when it is in pieces. For instance, the full-size varnished *Intestine* (1992)¹⁶⁵ (Fig. 56) which stretched out on the wall of the gallery space, has been removed from its natural location under the skin and presented as a unique focus. Although it is presented as an isolated element, this fragment, this part, refers to the whole body that it has been separated from. Despite the scientific accuracy of its presentation, the subject is less the physical description of the human body than its fragility and mortality. “I’m making work that’s about the body, playing with the indestructibility of life, where life is this ferocious force that keeps propelling us; at the same time, it’s also about how you can just pierce it and it dies. I’m always playing between these two extremes about life.”¹⁶⁶

Considering Kiki Smith’s interest in fragmentation the questions which come to mind are: To what capacity is Smith’s loyalty with the local identity of individual organs and bodily processes (foetus, placenta, menstrual fluid...) and at what expense of the totalizing body? These questions seem pertinent when assessing Smith’s work against Messenger’s. With *Penetration* Messenger fragments the human body and although she keeps its individual parts intact she modifies the body’s internal structure in such a way that upon closer examination its totality only appears to be unharmed. Inside *Penetration* the organs although whole and complete in themselves represent the body (in pieces) as it appears as an abstract construction rather than having a variable materiality possessed by

¹⁶⁵ Kiki Smith, *Intestine*, Ink on “gampi” paper, 185 x 114cm approx., 1992.

¹⁶⁶ Kiki Smith, in Carlo McCormick, *Journal of Contemporary Art Online*, 1991.

a particular human subject. For instance, Messenger makes it possible for the participant to join parts (of unconnected statements) in order to create new, and often illogical sentences. Until now, I have talked about “the body” as a unitary entity (a sum of fragments) and it is this idealization of the body - this represented abstractness - that is of particular interest to me in my research.

c) Light

As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, light is used as being a condition of *Penetration*’s presentation. The bare bulbs that hang from the ceiling illuminate the work from its inside in order to make it whole. Suspended alongside the individual body parts this special lighting complements the installation and gives it intensity.

Entering Annette Messenger’s *Penetration* is like experiencing an array of internal human body parts which hang in mid-air and suspend on display. Due to this carefully considered lighting, “frightening” shadows are created that contrast with the vibrant colors of the organs and their almost whimsical shapes. Therefore, the organs - objects - that seem to be “dancing” around the viewer who walks amongst them assume grotesque shapes on the bare walls. Simultaneously, when inside the composition the participant’s own body also becomes projected and cast onto the gallery walls and his or her shadow suggests the contour and/or the trace of his or her own body.

Various artists use light as a standard of their work. French artist, born in Paris in 1944, Christian Boltanski, close friend and contemporary of Annette Messenger, is known for his

body of work that may be considered as a disturbing archive of our social, cultural, ethnic, and personal histories. Boltanski's death-obsessed creations have earned him an international reputation. However, it is for his systematic use of bare bulbs inside his compositions that I have chosen to discuss Boltanski's work.

After appearing off and on in his own work until 1969, when he removed himself from it, Christian Boltanski concentrated on photographs in which he explored the perceived truth of the photograph: how it is often used as a shield against death. For the past decade and a half, Boltanski has been creating installations which explore his longstanding interest in identity, narrative and biography. In these haunting installations which use light-bulbs, shadows, blurred second and third-generation prints made from found or borrowed family photos, clothing, and linen, the artist presents personal histories which expose photography's ties to memory, loss, and mourning, as well as its vulnerabilities to the claim of truth.

Like Annette Messager, Christian Boltanski produced 'theatrical compositions' by fashioning small marionette-like figures from cardboard, scraps of materials, thread and cork, painted in color and transposed photographically into large picture formats. These led to kinetic installations in which a strong light focused on figurative shapes helped create a mysterious environment of silhouettes in movement. *The Shadows* (Les Ombres, 1984)¹⁶⁷ (Fig. 57) capitalizes on how shadows seem both magical, because they dance, and sinister, because we come to realize that the figures are skeletons and hanged men.

¹⁶⁷ Christian Boltanski, *The Shadows / Les Ombres*, cardboard figurines, paper, lead, wire, projectors, fan, steel rods, dimensions variable, FRAC Bourgogne Collection, 1984.

With this work Boltanski demonstrates how art may both enchant and disturb the viewer. This process can closely be tied to Messenger's.

Although light is inherent in many of Boltanski's composition, various contemporary artists use light as a condition of their artwork. During the 1980s, Mona Hatoum turned to making installations in which the spectator becomes the performer as he is invited to explore iron or steel constructions that radiate a threatening energy through the use of shadow, heat or magnetic fields. In many of her most ambitious installations from the 1990s, Mona Hatoum has worked with materials and forms, such as stainless steel, glass and wire mesh, which are often used in conjunction with electricity to produce sound and light. Borders of rooms are made of fencing, furniture is indicated by contours, and most three-dimensional forms are transparent, letting in the light and creating a longing for "the other side" and "the other."

Mona Hatoum's dramatic installation *Light Sentence* (1992)¹⁶⁸ (fig. 58-59) is a dark, cell-like room enclosed on three sides with wire mesh, consisting of three rows of wire mesh lockers of the sort one would find in any school or factory, arranged in a U-shape around a darkened gallery. Hanging from the ceiling is a single bare light bulb, which is continually lowered and raised. As the light moves, it casts intricate criss-crossing shadows on the walls and ceiling. When the bulb touches the floor, it tilts, which causes it to oscillate on its ascent to the ceiling. Wildly distorted shadows sway along with the light bulb, and the whole gallery seems to rock frantically. The effect is at once menacing and mysterious; to stand anywhere near the work is to be hypnotized by it. The bulb

¹⁶⁸ Mona Hatoum, *Light Sentence*, wire-mesh, lockers, light bulbs, dimensions variable, 1992.

moves with the rhythm of a prison searchlight, first blinding us in its glare, then lulling us into a reverie induced by the restlessly shifting patterns of light and dark. The effect of the piece is alternately vertiginous, frightening, and stridently striking.

Containment and restraint have been consistent themes in Hatoum's work. As it is the case in Messenger's art, much of Hatoum's production relies on distortions of scale for its efficacy and dramatic intensity. Hatoum utilizes magnification and multiplication to reveal what the eye cannot see literally or to compound the meaning and expand the possibilities of that which is recognizable in everyday life but nonetheless left unnoticed or cognitively neglected. The single light bulb oscillates and creates a shadow inside the obscure unit. Less apparently subjective than the magnification of the endoscopic journey through her bodyworks or than her earlier piece entitled, *Look No Body!* (1981), where she amplified the natural sounds of her heartbeat and stomach, with *Light Sentence* Hatoum turns the viewer into a fascinated victim, where the aesthetic dimension of the torture chamber and interrogation room is implied. Mesmerized by the intimacy created inside the work Hatoum's viewer is also made deeply uncomfortable by his transgression. Messenger who uses the participant to complete and bring *Penetration* to life has exploited the same practices. Scale, light, the viewers' participation... are common methods that both artists have used to express their artistic intentions, ideas and emotions. However, unlike Mona Hatoum, Annette Messenger does not use technology inside her works and brings the sensory experience to a deeper level. As Christine Ross supports in her article entitled « Toucher l'autre : une histoire de surfaces » : « Le désir chez Hatoum se développe par une esthétique qui transforme la profondeur du contact avec l'autre en une

surface de contact avec l'autre ».¹⁶⁹ When Hatoum moves on the surface (of the screen) where body (of the viewer and of the artist) and technology meet, Messenger drives her inquiry deeper into the body and in the senses. Touch is no longer produced on the surface of the body but rather inside it.

d) Transformation

French performance and multimedia artist Orlan, who pursues a relationship with late twentieth century technology, has something in common with medical researchers. Orlan's contemporary art form is plastic surgery, which she uses to articulate self-transformation. *The Reincarnation of Saint-Orlan* (Fig. 60-61) began in 1990 when the artist underwent a series of seven planned cosmetic surgery operations/performances. In 1993, with *Ominipresence*, Orlan worked on her self-portrait through its literal inscription on her flesh according to a model created by a computer montage of the archetypes of the Renaissance masters: Diana, Europa, Psyche, Venus and Mona Lisa. (Orlan chose the nose of an unattributed School of Fontainebleau sculpture of *Diana*; the mouth of Boucher's *Europa*; the forehead of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*; the chin of Botticelli's *Venus* and the eyes of Gerome's *Psyche*.) With this "work" she gestured toward the definers of Art for a predominant European tradition and offered to surpass their work by taking it one step further into completion. The surgeries, which planned a series of incremental changes to her face and body, were televised with access to all details and connected via satellite to several art institutions. The operations, which would have not been possible without medically qualified collaborators, were staged and

¹⁶⁹ Christine Ross, "Toucher l'autre: une histoire de surfaces corpo-électroniques" *Public 13, Touch In Contemporary Art*, (1996), 138.

followed a careful preparation and a calculated choreography. Not only was the viewer given access to the procedure but since Orlan refuses to undergo general anesthesia the artist became an active participant in the surgery and in doing so she challenged the traditional medical practice. Afterwards, video tapes of the procedure could be exhibited, along with samples of the removed tissue in glass reliquaries.

In summary, Orlan's theatrical surgeries cross the borderline decisively into the domain of medical experiment. And although these operations are risky, bloody, painful and difficult they may perhaps be deemed aesthetic since they test the possibilities for altering form and feature.

Author Jane Goodall states: "Orlan claims to have no interest in improving her looks, and therefore no psychological or emotional need to change them. Challenged with comparisons to Michael Jackson, she responds that he is a victim of a culture that makes a generic commodity of the personal image, whilst her own work subverts this through an assertion of the supremacy of the individual designing will over the late capitalist image factory."¹⁷⁰ Since Orlan has never had a conventional face-lift, her surgical reconstructions are no attempt to ward off age and ugliness. On the contrary, Orlan questions the very basis of self-perception and bodily identification when she states that "being a narcissist isn't easy when the question is not of loving your own image, but of

¹⁷⁰ Jane Goodall. *Whose Body? Ethics and Experiment in Performance Art*, Medicine & Body Conference, Perth, August 1996.

re-creating the self through deliberate acts of alienation.”¹⁷¹ Consequently, Orlan’s “Carnal Art”¹⁷² is about working on the borderline.

Beginning her performances by reading from Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni’s psychoanalytic text, *La Robe*, which describes the skin as deceptive, Orlan interprets the kind of gap people experience between who they feel they are and what their image tells them they are and shows through her creations (re-creations) that one is never what one has (our exterior: the skin) but what one is (our interior).¹⁷³ Consequently, plastic surgery is the pathway that enables intervention at the level of borders and boundaries; it is the means that bridges her feeling of strangeness and unfamiliarity upon confronting her image in the mirror.

For Orlan the body - her own - can be touched, altered, opened up and used as a logical progression in her quest for ultimate self-transformation. Messenger also reworks bodies in her art. Like Orlan, in the 1970s Messenger used her own body as a site of investigation, but since the 1980s she draws on a generic body to produce, show and convey the idea of transformation.

While decay is not a recurrent theme in Messenger’s works, there are several relations between the artist’s imagery and that of artists who use decomposition as a fundamental

¹⁷¹ Barbara Rose, “Is It Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act”, *Art in America* (February 1993): 83.

¹⁷² Orlan refers to her art as Carnal Art to differentiate it from Body Art.

¹⁷³ For a thorough analysis of Orlan’s practice see Michelle Hirschhorn, “Orlan: Artist in the Post-Human Age of Mechanical Reincarnation. Body as Ready (to be Re-) Made” in Griselda Pollock’s, *Generations and Geographies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 110-134.

component in their art. Firstly, *Penetration*'s organs are displayed like meat inside butcher shops: hanging or as it has been discussed previously like dissected organs after anatomical dissections. Secondly, because these organs are isolated from the life force that would allow them to live, they are obsolete and "dead." Accordingly, decay seems a valid matter of the installation.

As aforementioned, Damien Hirst's work is atypical since it displays the artist's characteristic and coherent philosophy of life and death. According to him, if the way to live is through the pleasures and sensations of the body, the best way to do this is to not deceive oneself about death. Consequently, death, isolation and separation stand forth as central themes of the artist's art. Corporeality becomes what is important and Hirst's representations depict the body without the mind, a machine with various uses, different from animals only in shape and form, where the difference between man and animal is not shown to be spiritual or intellectual but rather physical.

Although the artist's art is diverse, the corporeal focus is most evident in the glass cases of medical models and skeletons, human and animal. For the cabinet series Hirst displayed collections of surgical tools or hundreds of pill bottles on highly ordered shelves.¹⁷⁴ For example, one work, a case of hundreds of handmade replicas of pills, looks more like a tribute to, rather than a denigration of, pharmaceuticals. However, its

¹⁷⁴ Damien Hirst, *Holidays/No Feelings*, drug bottles in cabinet, 54 in. x 40 in. x 9 in., white cube London and Gagosian Gallery, New York, 1989.

title, *The Void*¹⁷⁵ (Fig. 62-63) informs us on how to interpret the work. Like *Penetration*, which becomes compelling through its title, the message that is conveyed is that if we are supposed to live in line with our bodies, we must also be aware of the inevitability of death.

Lost Love and *Love Lost*¹⁷⁶ (Fig. 64) two huge twin cased windows filled with water, office or medical equipment and a multitude of fish also bring in the traditional Hirst theme of decay. In *Lost Love*, the process is subtler and less odoriferous than his previous works done with rotting animal. Just as his earlier works the elements inside *Lost Love* decay, however, although the gynecologist's chairs, new at the beginning of the show quickly cover with rust they do not smell. In *Love Lost*, large black carp fish swim in an enclosed environment of surgical instruments, a couch, a table, a computer, a watch, and a ring. Hirst's use of medical equipment is a convenient way to both focus on the body and remind the viewer of medicine's inability to protect this body from death.

For his tank series or Natural History series, for which he is best known - where dead animals, such as a shark, a sheep or a cow are preserved in formaldehyde - the notion death, expressed whether in the relationship between mother and child (*Mother and Child, Divided*, 1983)¹⁷⁷ (Fig. 65), man and beast or art and reality, is also essential. In utilizing formalin, its potential in contents and aesthetics, the work plays rather explicitly on our efforts to deny life's fundamental transience. The way the animals are presented

¹⁷⁵ Damien Hirst, *The Void*, polished stainless-steel cabinet with mirror back, 16 000 different pills, glass locked doors, 15 x 17 feet, Gagosian Gallery, New York, 2000.

¹⁷⁶ Damien Hirst, *Lost Love* and *Love Lost*, aquatic tanks and filtration units, 108 x 84 x 84 in., 1999-2000.

¹⁷⁷ Damien Hirst, *Mother and Child: Divided*. Steel, GRP composites, glass, silicone sealants, cow, calf formaldehyde solution, dimensions variable, 1993.

points to animals as the visitor meets them in the museums of natural history, research laboratories and anatomical institutions. In such places the animals are stuffed and preserved objects for human examination, presented as a piece of dead nature made tangible for human analysis and experiment. Thus, the work questions the way in which the viewer relates to the use of animals in the service of enlightenment and progress. They are as if torn out of time and place and float in a peaceful, almost weightless condition. They are seemingly placed in an eternal and immutable sphere and it is as such that they simultaneously remind us that animals in other cultures are considered holy. However, Hirst's presentation gives them a degree of elevated inaccessibility which encourages our views to turn to ancient embalming rituals. Simultaneously, the reference to scientifically preserved animals also makes it possible to look at the tanks as a form of ready-made, an object taken from the world of reality, pulled out of its original context and placed in the halls of institutional art. Perhaps it is precisely this unaccustomed and disturbing context that causes the work to attract attention and contemplation - as if in a new way. In the end we are left with our need to conserve, catalogue and systematize.

Unlike Damien Hirst, the diagrammatic quality, found in Annette Messager's piece, provides a compelling visual extravagance that does not connect with the reality of the body's internal functions since the organs are placed randomly, side by side. However, the composition reminds the viewer of the body as it still displays everyone's internal fears because it evokes life only to point out its absence.

While decay is not a continuing theme present in Messenger's oeuvre, there are several associations possible between the artist's imagery and Hirst's water tanks. Placed at the center of the composition, both factually and figuratively, the body parts, whether human or animal, are celebrated and placed inside the composition to agitate the viewer as well as shake up the traditional artistic archetype.

The issue of what happens to our bodies after death is also confused in Hirst's works. Some works suggest that death is a cleanly scientific happening while others, like *Adam and Eve (Banished from the Garden)* (1999)¹⁷⁸ (Fig. 66), where two covered "bodies" on steel gurneys surrounded by saws and scalpels as well as bits of bone and fat (from what looks like a cooked chicken) make death to be a violation of the body, an unnatural reversal and deprivation, present a more horrific picture.

The theme of decaying bodies and the focus on life and death is a central preoccupation inside contemporary works as various artists focus predominantly on the paramount importance attached to the body as a manifestation of being. Although much of Jana Sterbak's artistic production centers around themes of power, control, seduction, sexuality and the ways in which human beings have turned to technology to transcend their physicality, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987)¹⁷⁹ (Fig. 67-68) received widespread publicity, as it was composed of fifty pieces of flank steak that cured over a period of several weeks inside the museum until the artist replaced it with a fresh

¹⁷⁸ Damien Hirst, *Adam and Eve* was shown at "Theories, Models, Methods, Approaches, Assumptions, Results and Findings," New York, Gargosian Gallery, 2000.

¹⁷⁹ Jana Sterbak, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, meat, 1987.

meat dress. First exhibited in 1987 at Montreal's Galerie René Blouin when exhibited in Ottawa, Sterbak's meat dress drew the criticism of Canadians. During the duration of the exhibition *Vanitas* matured and putrefied as the steaks which remained on display, dried, rotted and smelled. In the course of the show, the meat dress changed in structure and shape and transformed from bloody meat into dried-up leather. As the meat slowly died, it became increasingly permanent. With her unusual choice of material, Sterbak challenged the concept of the permanent and constant that is traditionally associated with sculpture, and turned her work of art into processes and materials into actors. This work shows the body in its most physical and fleshy aspect as the *Flesh Dress* addresses death directly through pieces of real (bovine) death, the implication of a flayed human body surface and through the inevitable decay, which is part of the "life" of this work.

However, while Jana Sterbak alludes to the memento mori as an allegory for life's transience through her title: *Vanitas* - which quite obviously invites such an interpretation through its reference to the vanitas convention - she simultaneously explores how the female body is inscribed with cultural meaning through fashion. The vanitas convention is an old one, particularly popular in Dutch still-life painting, in which a plethora of desirable worldly objects (often food and game) is countered by reminders of death and the "vanity" of superficial pleasures. Her mini-dress made from sixty pounds of meat was a provocative and gruesome commentary on women's subjugation which conceptually linked her work within a genealogy of female artists investigating the politics of representation. In addition, *Vanitas* has been interpreted as a metaphor for the aging human body, a memento mori, reminding us of our own inevitable death and decay.

Although Annette Messenger does not present a decaying body, similar to Damien Hirst and Jana Sterbak, transience and transformation make up *Penetration*.

Life and death are essential elements of the work. For one, as I have demonstrated previously, the dead organs are brought to life by way of the participant's action. Transformation of both, the artwork and the viewer, are also important aspects of *Penetration*.

As a recurrent theme, transformation can be found in Messenger's work *Dependence–Independence* (Dépendance–Indépendance, 1995-1996)¹⁸⁰ (Fig. 69-73) that follows *Penetration* and which clearly stems from it. *Dependence–Independence* is one grand installation made of different areas that dissolve into each other. Multicoloured sculpture-words, children's toys, stuffed animals, photographs of parts of the body, photographs of children making faces and a thousand other chimeras make the dim lit work in which the viewer is invited to lose himself.

Like *Penetration*, the dim light inside *Dependence–Independence* accounts for some of the hypnotic quality of the work. Also Messenger incorporated a wide array of materials in order to create *Dependence–Independence* - photography (her own prints and those of others), painting, embroidery, sculpture, assemblage, collage, film montage, found objects, toys, crayons... and even writing - and because the artist refused to differentiate high and low forms of art and mixed them with the quotidian (like she had previously

¹⁸⁰ Annette Messenger, *Dependence–Independence* / *Dépendance–Indépendance*, 1995-1996.

done with *Penetration*) her standpoint towards art making was still all-encompassing and non-hierarchical.

With *Penetration*, Messsager had demonstrated an acute feel for compositional strategies, however, with *Dependence–Independence* the lack of overall shape made the whole seem conceptually amorphous and despite the thematic divisions, the installation seemed more the result of an accumulative process than of any very uncanny design.

Nonetheless, the position of the viewer/participant is similar in both arrangements. Like it had been the case in *Penetration*, with *Dependence–Independence* upon entering through the hearth's shadowy edges, the viewer brushed past hundreds of objects strung on single strands of bright yarn. Like the body's interior inside *Penetration* had been designed so that the body could be experienced physically, inside *Dependence–Independence* viewers are similarly subjected to a state of complete absorption and empathy, precisely because they are now situated within the work, and not just outside of it. With *Dependence–Independence* in the same way as with *Penetration*, Messenger's approach is communicative as she directly involves the audience in - inside - the work. As the viewer wanders inside the composition Messenger's way of filling space, and the things she fills it with, surround him or her in the most interesting way.

With *Penetration* (and *Dependence–Independence*) what is certain is the role-playing, the penetration of current reality with fragmented, clichéd images, charged with memories of the (utopian) experiences that human beings at different times and in different cultures

have always endured. Like the artist had done it, in an innovative way with *Penetration* - as the viewer penetrates a human body - inside *Dependence–Independence* touch becomes inherent in the work's composition. Yet, where the viewer touched the represented body parts with his or her own body inside *Penetration*, with *Dependence–Independence* he or she penetrates inside a “confusion” or rather a sum of constitutive parts reminiscent of the different stages of evolution of the artist's career.

In describing *Penetration* and Messenger's own personal aesthetics against past and contemporary references I have situated the artist's approach and the means which she employs to demonstrate her attempt to document the parcelling of life.

Messenger's choice to represent the body with respect to existing models while infusing her art with her own interpretations is quite significant. Although Messenger's body is not structured according to the accurate order of the normal male and female human bodies - since certain organs are represented more than once, since their organization doesn't allow the body's functioning and their size isn't true... - it is the interpretation of a complete, anatomically detailed, three-dimensional representation of the human body. Framed within specific theoretical (medical) and artistic discourses, Messenger's visceral body is diagrammatic and reveals how the body is a cultural and historical phenomenon.

Then again, *Penetration* simultaneously exposes that the body is a biological and material phenomenon. In 1989, feminist thinker and author Judith Butler explains in “Foucault

and the Paradox of Bodily Inscription”¹⁸¹ “the figure of the interior soul understood as *within* the body is produced through the inscription on the body... Indeed, the soul requires the body for its signification, and requires also that the body signify its own limit and depth through corporeal means.” Although *Penetration* seems to reduce the human body to organs, paradoxically it accomplishes the opposite, as it acts as a signifier for the self which relies on the physical.

The body is a biological, material entity and embodiment is an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and by mode of presence and engagement in the world. Today, the body as we understand it in the human sciences has become increasingly unstable as an object of knowledge: we have bodies but there are multiple modes of embodiment and styles of bodily objectification that are critical for the understanding of culture. It has been established that the body is as much the subject as the object of its own perception. We are forced to perceive, imagine, think ourselves - in ourselves, by ourselves, with ourselves and through ourselves. Yet only the fact that consciousness and body do work as two, albeit in tandem, causing a distancing of the psychological system from the organic processes of the body, makes possible for us the formulation of thoughts about the body. There is no escape from this cycle - we are (in) our body. With *Penetration*, Messenger exemplifies this point clearly and as such establishes herself as an important contemporary authority.

¹⁸¹ Judith Butler, “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscription,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 86 (November 1989): 605-6.



Plate 45.

Pedestrian Underpass in Munster
from which the cast for *Tallow* was made in 1977.

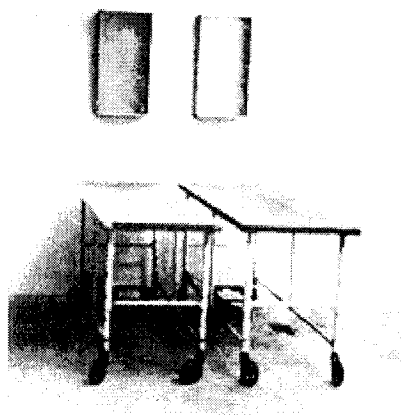


Plate 46.

Joseph Beuys

Show Your Wounds

Detail

1974-1975

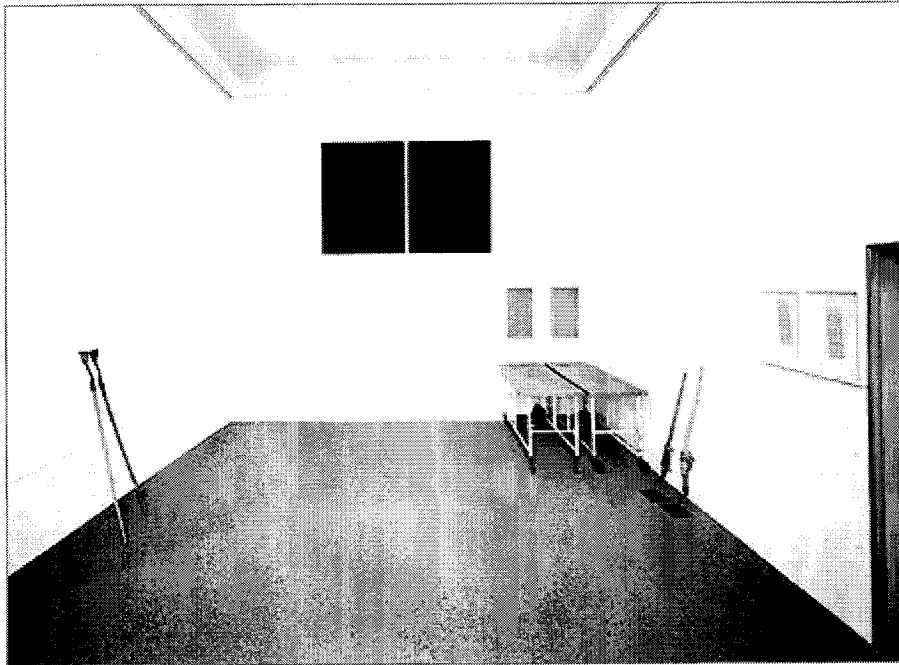


Plate 47.

Joseph Beuys

Show Your Wound

The Legacy Project

Visual Arts Library



Plate 48.

Annette Messenger mounting *Chimaeras* in her studio

1983

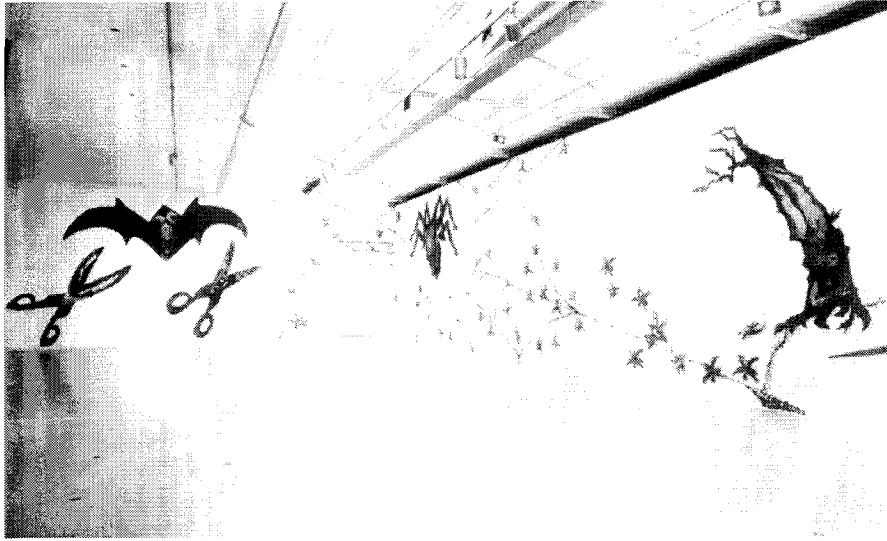


Plate 49.

Annette Messenger

The Chimaeras Traps (Les Pièges à Chimères)

1984

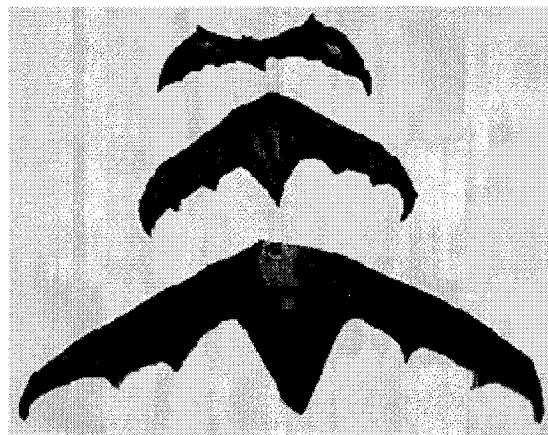


Plate 50.

Annette Messenger

Chimaeras (Chimères)

1982-1984



Plate 51.

Damien Hirst

Hymn

1996

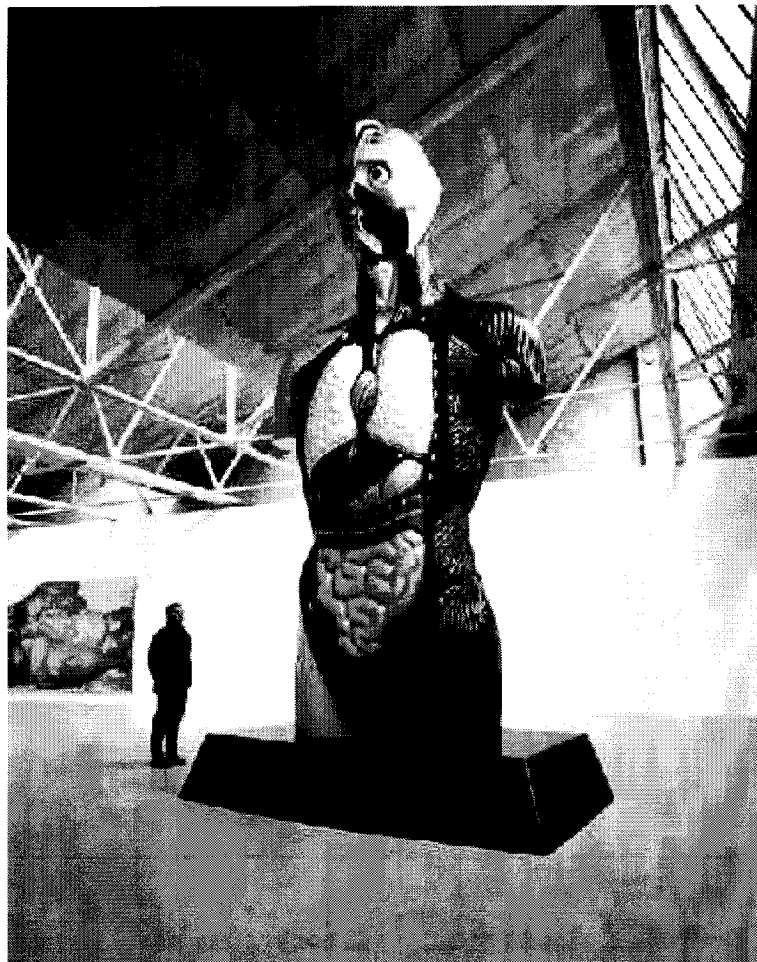


Plate 52.

Damien Hirst

Hymn

2000

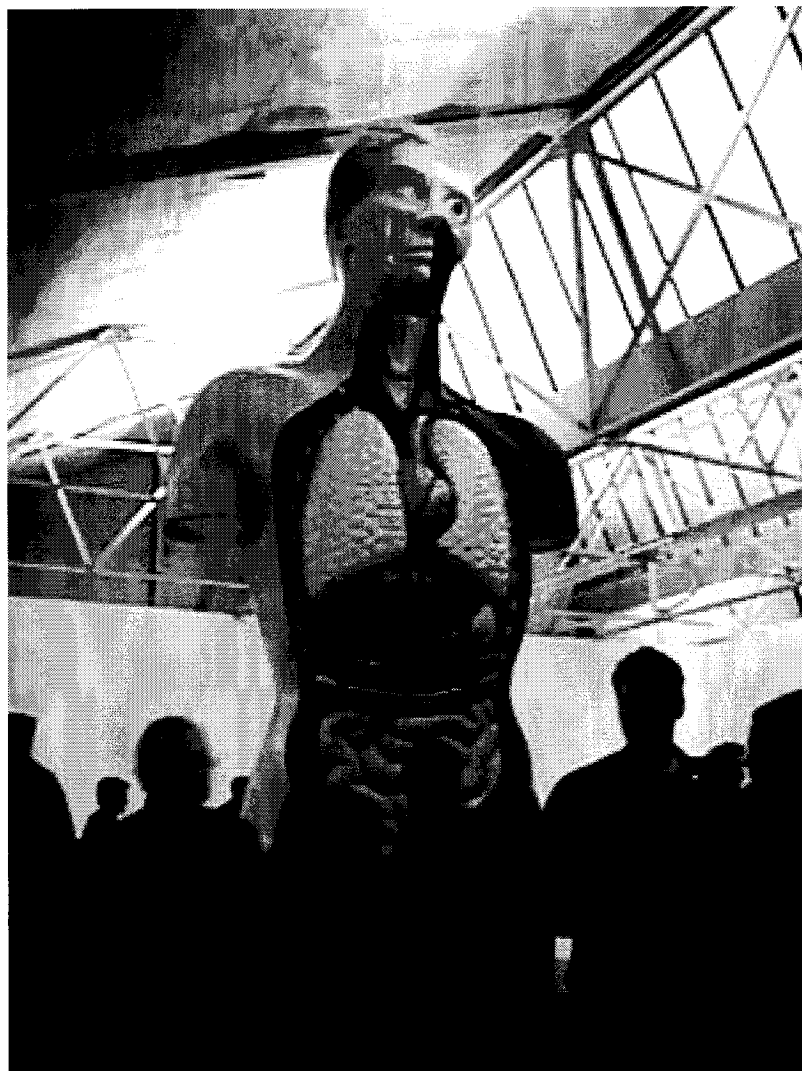


Plate 53.

Damien Hirst

Hymn

1999

Photo by Mary Barone

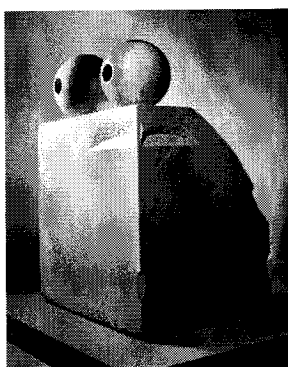


Plate 54.

Louise Bourgeois

Eyes

1982

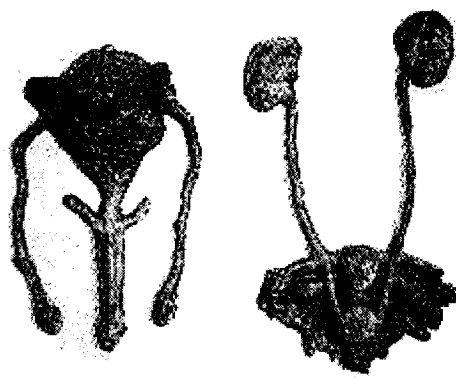


Plate 55.

Kiki Smith

Uro-Genital System – diptych (male and female)

1986



Plate 56.

Kiki Smith

Intestine

1989

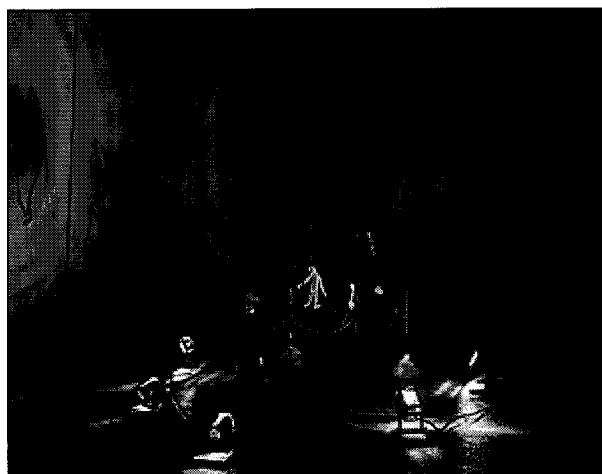


Plate 57.

Christian Boltanski

The Shadows (Les Ombres)

1984

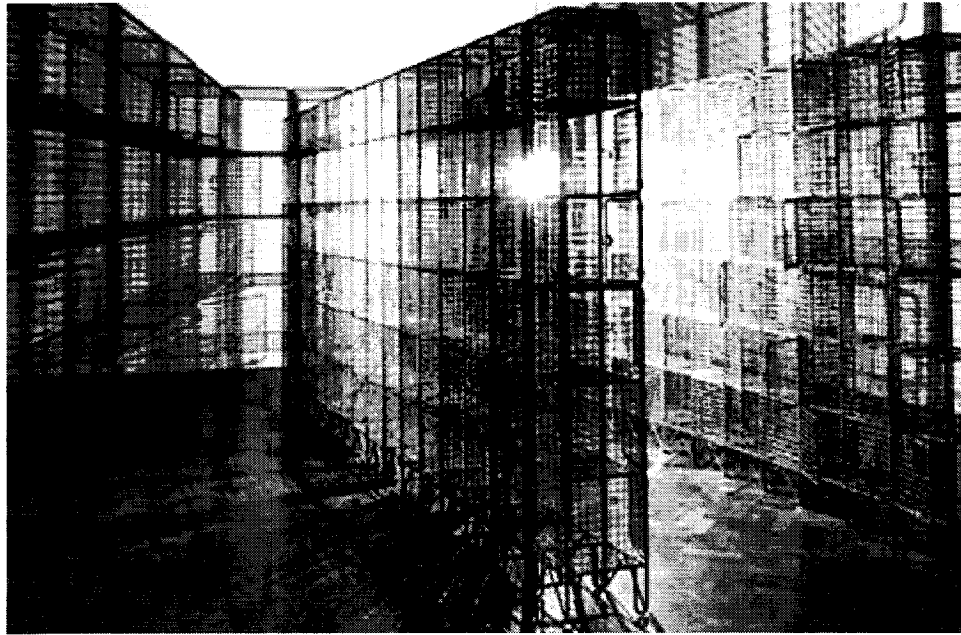


Plate 58.

Mona Hatoum

Light Sentence

1992

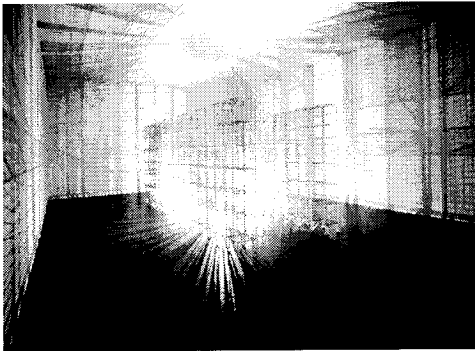


Plate 59.

Mona Hatoum

Light Sentence

1992



Plate 60.

Orlan

The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan

Artist in front of the models



Plate 61.

Orlan

The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan

1992

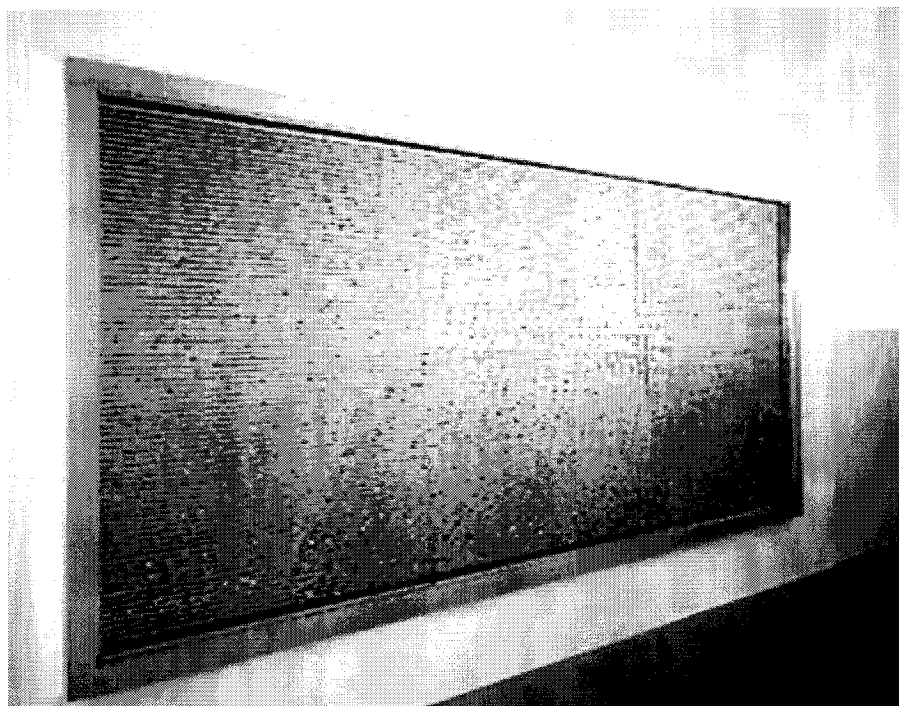


Plate 62.

Damien Hirst

The Void

Installation View

2000

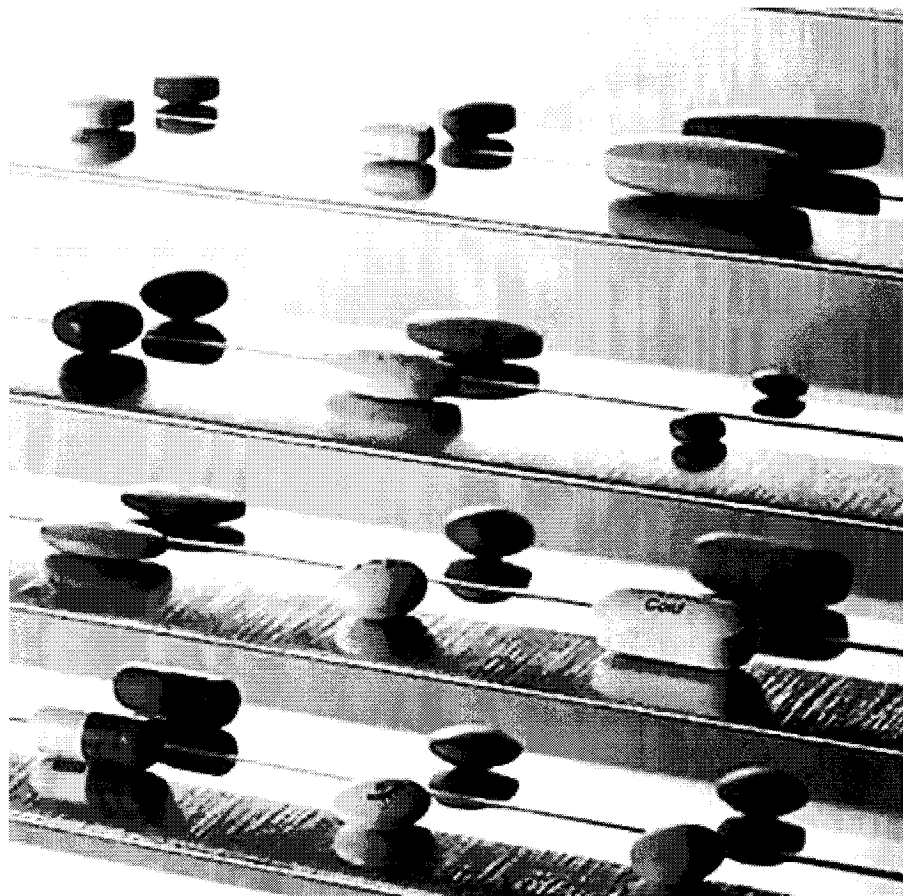


Plate 63.

Damien Hirst

The Void

Detail

2000

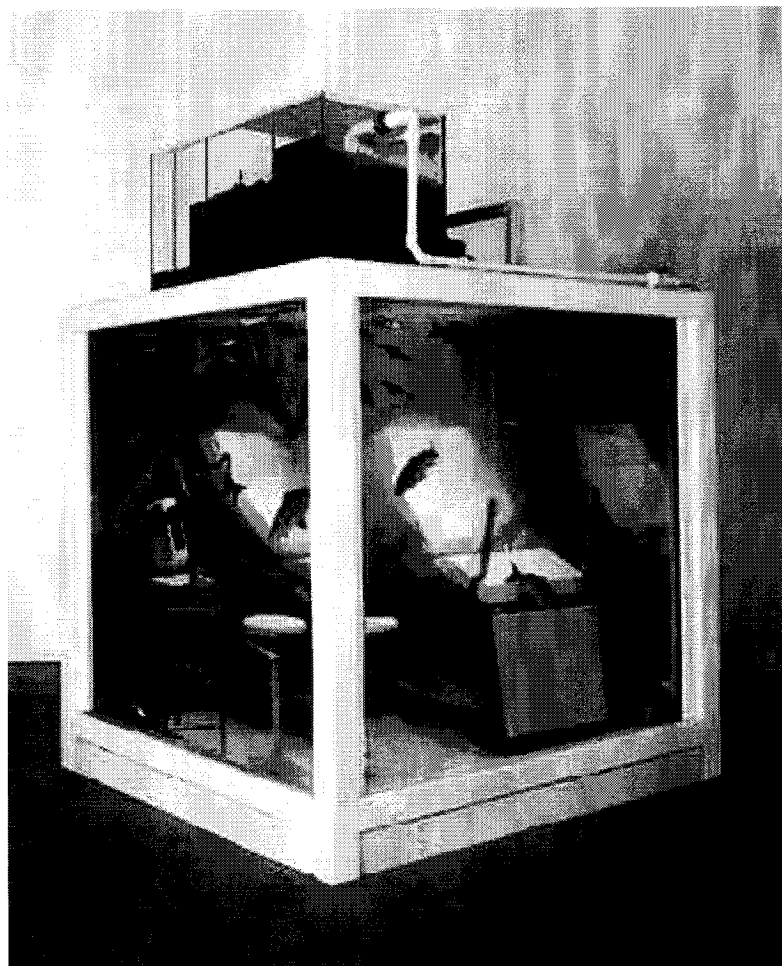


Plate 64.

Damien Hirst

Love Lost

2000

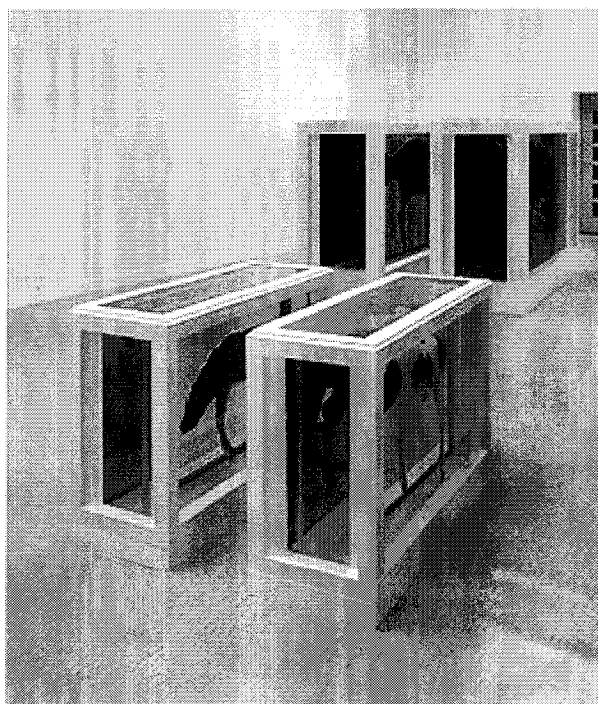


Plate 65.

Damien Hirst

Mother and Child, Divided

1993

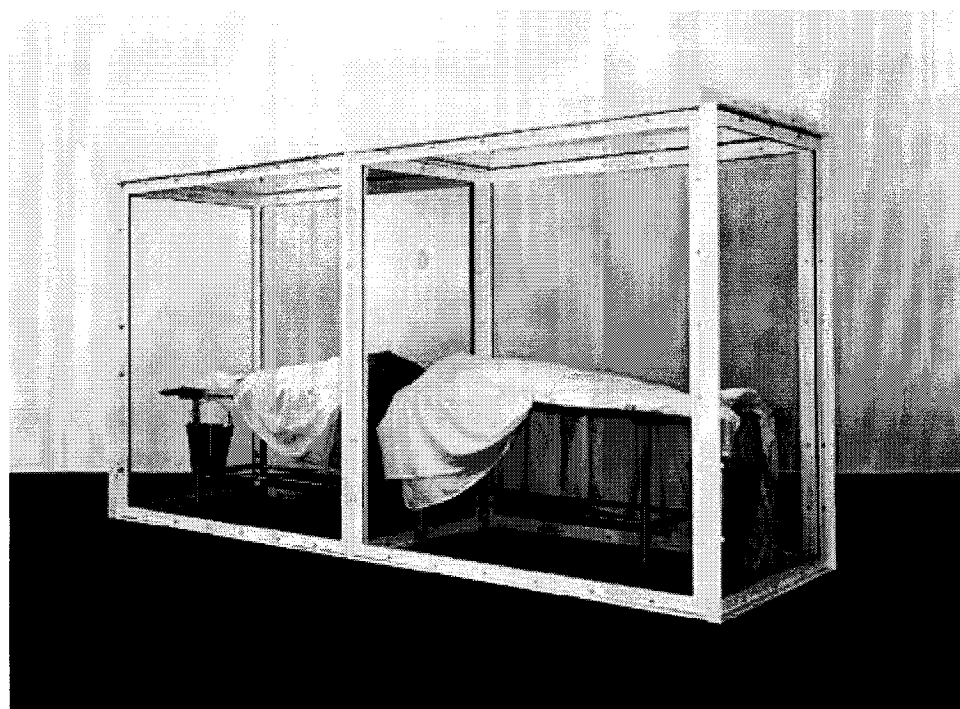


Plate 66.

Damien Hirst

Adam and Eve (Banished from the Garden)

1999



Plate 67.

Jana Sterbak

Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic

Detail

1987

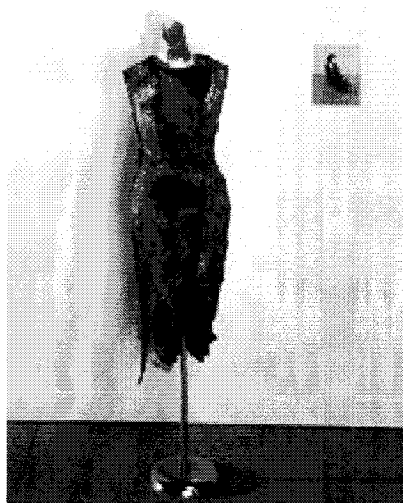


Plate 68.

Jana Sterbak

Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic

1987



Plate 69.

Annette Messenger

Dependence – Independence

(Dépendance – Indépendance)

1995-1996



Plate 70.

Annette Messenger

Dependence -- Independence

(Dépendance – Indépendance)

1995-1996



Plate 71.

Annette Messenger

Dependence – Independence

(Dépendance – Indépendance)

1996



Plate 72.

Annette Messenger

Dependence – Independence

(Dépendance – Indépendance)

1995-1997



Plate 73.

Annette Messenger

Dependence – Independence

(Dépendance – Indépendance)

1995

CHAPTER IV.

Touching the Parts

By way of *Penetration*, Annette Messenger operates an autopsy of the human body. As such, the body - delimited and representing the quintessential individual - is threatened and its boundaries have become permeable. Opened up to networks of influence (inside and out) and through plays of scale and fragmentation, the represented body is abstracted and estranged from the rules of conformity and normality. Unlike medical images - which the work is rooted in - that tell a story based on images - where the fantasy of transparency opens the human body to a number of visibilities, unveiling it in a macabre stripping - Messenger recounts a story that does not only rely wholly on images, but rather involves physical experience and specifically the sense of touch.

This chapter's intention is to demonstrate how Messenger establishes a particular mode of embodiment and style of bodily objectification which is critical for the understanding of our contemporary Western culture. Via medical imagery - past and contemporary - and by means of her artistry, Annette Messenger examines what it means to have a body in today's contemporary Western culture and moreover what, according to her, counts as body today. In creating a body which can be experienced visually and which can simultaneously be physically touched from the inside (which is as a rule impossible) Messenger drives the viewer's experience to the ultimate awareness of himself or herself,

where the body he or she experiences while going through *Penetration* becomes no more than a dissemination of his or her own body and a projection of himself or herself into the public space. Since touch is the most intimate of all the senses - as it evaporates the limits by confusing the boundaries of the body - I will demonstrate that with *Penetration* Messenger treats the body as a site of sensory transformation.

In addition, I will examine how Annette Messenger is concerned with *Penetration's* interior atmosphere and with a path that must be followed in order for the viewer to experience the body in a different and intimate way. Different in that, no full view of the body is possible notwithstanding when the viewer is placed outside the composition. In spite of the viewer's positioning what is seen is a body in pieces. Intimate, since the body recalls religious artefacts and past practices. But above all, because the body is made out of felt and can also be felt and sensed.

While Messenger represents a body that has been fragmented by science, a body which has been dissected by medicine, she also produces a body - by way of her manipulation of religious artefacts and via her interpretation of such practices as traditional women's crafts - which can be brought to life by the viewer. *Penetration* becomes a space where the represented body is set in motion and where the viewer who experiences it, lives it through and through.

Where medical discourse maintains a distance with the body¹⁸², with *Penetration*, Messenger questions that distance and opens the body to outside influences: to a viewer who, because of his or her “penetration” affects the work’s construction while simultaneously composing with his or her own sense of embodiment.

Our skin is what stands between us and the world. Amongst other things, skin gives us our individual shape, it protects us from the outside world and it holds inside our viscera and our body fluids. As the largest organ of the body it is interesting to see that with *Penetration*, Messenger has chosen to disregard that organ while all the other major organs of the body make the work. By doing so the artist allows the viewer to access an environment that is generally not a familiar one. In this section I will establish, Messenger strips the human body down with the intention of opening it and presenting it in such a way that it is ready to be seen and entered. But the eye is no longer the only sense involved. Annette Messenger has given the viewer the power to invent his or her own narrative by producing an interactive composition, thus, transforming the installation into a performative space. Accordingly, inside the installation the body Messenger creates becomes transformed by the visitor’s participation. I will also explicate that *Penetration* may be characterized as sexual by virtue of its title and perhaps the presence of the foetus inside the arrangement.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Point which has been discussed thoroughly in “From Contemporary Medical Vision to Viewer Participation.”

¹⁸³ This point will be developed later in this chapter.

Using the diagrammatic quality of dissection textbooks Messenger has created a space where “the viewer brings his own story”¹⁸⁴ and experiences the body - that of the work and his own - as he or she is allowed to wander around internal organs and viscera. The viewer/participant/actor is asked to enter into the substance of the work, to meet its instability and contingency straight on. In “penetrating” the installation and circulating within it - like blood in the human body - the viewer forms a connection between the individual parts to create a (seemingly) unified body and thus brings the work - body - to life. Therefore, the actor’s body becomes the force that puts the installation in motion. Invited to enter this new world, the viewer can experience - see and feel - it in a compelling new way and his or her body - his or her “touch” - becomes an essential component of the formal, conceptual and functional configuration.

By the juxtaposition of images, Messenger repeatedly discomforts the viewer, leaving the message unsettlingly mixed. By turns, the viewer is made into a reluctant voyeur, enticed to laugh at the artist’s combinations or plunged into inquiry and perhaps despair. Forms and images appear, dissolve, transform into the space as much as they alter the space itself. Consequently, *Penetration* is more than a mere record of the internal body.

With *Penetration* Messenger has invented a new possibility for the anatomical model to become the measure of the living being. The organs of *Penetration* imply death as they are dissociated from the body they live in for some evoking despair. However, since the viewer enters the work he and/or she becomes part of the work’s construction (part of the

¹⁸⁴ Annette Messenger. *Plaisirs. Déplaisirs: Le Bestiaire Amoureux d’Annette Messenger*, Schwerfel Heinz Peter, 2001, 60mns.

represented body's formation as well as his or her own construction.) Evocative of sorrow and decay, *Penetration* is a figure for the body's perishability. Many of the fragments it contains, however, seem to blossom as much as to disintegrate into forms that could suggest strange elements or perhaps a fantastic landscape of organs and objects that subtly metamorphose at the edges of memory.

Through *Penetration* Messenger attests that the body is a biological and material entity where embodiment is at the center of the piece. Where anatomy records the body while objectifying it - and thus keeping it at a distance - with *Penetration* the viewers experience themselves as both subject - viewing subject - and object - embodied situation. Since the viewers are bodily engaged they become more aware of their own actions and their consequences. In other words, *Penetration* stages our relationship to the world as one of estrangement and inclusion, identification and alienation as well as desire. Thus, it perhaps gives us a better understanding and awareness of the structure and composition of our bodies

The viewer who enters the work in the manner intended by the artist - i.e. touching and moving the organs - effects the body and its constancy. Even though the participant is the one who sets the work in motion he or she is also the one who disrupts its stability. The work stands tranquil until the participant's action, and subsequently the body develops into a lively mass while remaining a "broken down" entity.

Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*¹⁸⁵ provides us with a preliminary proposition for an analysis of the viewer's participation inside Messenger's *Penetration*. Although Kristeva's study is concerned with psychoanalysis and literature, her work proposes a method which can be suitable for a new reading of the work. For the French feminist, body fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into its outside (this is what death implies) to the hazardous divisions between the body's inside and its outside. All borderline states, functions, and positions are comprehended as dangers, sites of possible pollution or contamination where that which is marginal is always located as a site of danger and vulnerability. For Kristeva, fluids are considered as borderline states, disruptive of the solidity of things, entities and objects. However, according to her that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define it. If Kristeva's model is used as reference it can be assumed the participant, who disturbs the work's stability, serves as the initiator of movement and brings the body into being. Where the body represented in anatomical books is static, Messenger's body, which is planned following this standard, is creative since it is represented as active.

In everyday life, the human body is as much the subject as the object of its own perception. We are forced to perceive, imagine, think ourselves in ourselves, by ourselves, with ourselves and through ourselves. There is no escape from this cycle - we are (in) our body. Yet only consciousness and body work as two, in tandem, causing a distancing of the psychological system from the organic processes of the body and make

¹⁸⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

possible the formulation of thoughts about the body. Thus, living the body means experiencing it as transformable cultural meanings and readings.

In *Anatomy and Destiny. A Cultural History of the Human Body*, Stephen Kern explains how “Merleau-Ponty was one of a number of philosophers who challenged the traditional dualism of mind and body and developed an approach to the study of man that sought to embrace both aspects of existence in a conceptual whole.”¹⁸⁶ Since Merleau-Ponty restored the notion of “animated body” in the twentieth century, I believe the understanding of his work is valuable to support *Penetration*’s review.

According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty what allows us to be aware of our bodies is introception. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of introception is defined as the feel we have of what it is like to live in and through our bodies and to perceive other people and things in our bodily relationship to them. According to Merleau-Ponty the experienced body is at the “center of action”, that which places me “at” or “in” the heart of things, it is that “by means of which” there is a “world” at all for me, it is that which at once is my presence to the world, and is the world’s presence to me.

Inside the skin, it is introception (perception in the entirety) which allows us to perceive the visceral workings and felt intensities of our interior bodies. By definition, something is interoceptive (perception from the inside) when it is “of, relating to, or being stimuli

¹⁸⁶ Stephen Kern, *Anatomy and Destiny. A Cultural History of the Human Body* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1975), 238.

arising within the body and especially in the viscera.”¹⁸⁷ Subsequently, to a large extent, having a sense of one’s self has to do with touch since it has to do with how we feel. As author Diane Ackerman states in *A Natural History of the Senses* “our proprioceptors - from Latin for “one’s own receptors” - keep us informed about where we are in space” and “what we feel like moment to moment.”¹⁸⁸

Apart from feeling our bodies and living through our bodily sensations, when is it ever possible for us to perceive our insides besides when our body is malfunctioning? And when can we ever expect to see our own organs and touch them? Whether it be during and/or after an accident or right through surgery - thanks to today’s technology - we are able to see our functioning organs while they are still inside our body. Then again, this type of experience is not one which is common and, for instance, in the case of surgery the distance and flatness established by the screen prevents the patient from being in direct contact with the viscera. The practice which results is thus one which is primarily visual. Touching our internal organs is usually unfeasible. Unless a piece of organ has been taken out of our body - and consequently is damaged and lifeless it is impossible for us to be so close as to touch our own organs. By overlooking the skin, by removing it, Messenger allows the viewers to touch the organs. Yet, what needs to be mentioned is that interestingly it is with their skin that they do just that - since it is skin that holds the sense of touch.

¹⁸⁷ *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2 vol. Set; thumb indexed Edition) by Lesley Brown (Editor), Angus Stevenson (Editor) Judith Siefring, Hardcover, 2002.

¹⁸⁸ Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York: Random House, 1990), 95.

Via *Penetration* Messenger enables the viewers to go where they have never gone before by blurring the boundaries between inside and outside, and to confront an unprecedented experience.

In museums and art-galleries experiences - the boundaries between the visitor and the object - are well defined. It is understood where each begins and ends. In museums, the policies surrounding visitors' participation are clear and usually undisputed: no touching the works of art, no food or drinking allowed in exhibition areas, smoking is not permitted in the buildings, etc... For any visitor who enters an exhibition area it is instantly recognizable which rules apply. With *Penetration* the boundaries are blurred and seem to be non-existent. Although during Annette Messenger's, 1996, New York, Museum of Modern Art exhibition and retrospective¹⁸⁹, a guard was standing beside the work in order to ensure that it wouldn't be damaged by the visitors. *Penetration* was to be encountered and dealt with straight on. The visitor was encouraged to follow, what the title was directing him to do: penetrate it, yet pulling the parts was forbidden.

On one hand, with *Penetration*, Messenger allows the viewer/participant to enter inside a body and to experience embodiment on an alternative level: making the work an object to enter. In an interview given to founding director of the CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, Jean-Louis Froment, in 1997, Messenger expressed her intentions and stated: "I would like the viewer to no longer be only a voyeur, but more

¹⁸⁹ Annette Messenger. Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 12, 1995 to January 16, 1996.

active and penetrating - a kind of actor.”¹⁹⁰ Later in the interview she continues and affirms “this heart only exists and lives if there is circulation within it. The viewers are on an adventure; they bump into things and encounter the elements of the arrangement. They become the interpreters of the games I play.”¹⁹¹ Answering another question she goes on and asserts “Where one can go off wandering, choosing one’s own path - maybe even getting lost.”¹⁹² For Messenger the visitor isn’t just supposed to stand outside the work, but he or she is rather regarded as an accomplice who becomes engaged inside the body and in the work’s construction. Although Messenger traces the outline of the internal body as well as the pathways the viewers need to follow, the work lives for the participants as a maze where they must find their own way and where they will live their own personal experience.

Positioned at the “heart” of the work the viewer finds himself or herself inside a representation of the body and one experiences the body physically. Whether it be for morbid fascination or light-hearted appeal, the visitors - for the most part - infiltrate the piece. Once inside, they will experience space, the elements of the piece and their own bodies in a new fashion; given that the work is constructed in such a way that they will touch the body parts. Touch, becomes a key element of the installation. Because the organs are touched and/or brushed against the viewers/participants become the one who

¹⁹⁰ An interview with Jean-Louis Froment in *Penetrations. A Survey of Recent Sculptures and Installations*, (New York: Gargosian Gallery, 1997), 66.

¹⁹¹ An interview with Jean-Louis Froment in *Penetrations. A Survey of Recent Sculptures and Installations*, id., 70.

¹⁹² Ibid., 70.

transform the overall appearance of the work: firstly, because he or she enters it and secondly because he or she sets it in motion.

On the other hand, the viewers who choose to stay outside the work can watch the moment when the participant decides on moving in a specific way, at a particular speed, or to sustain a stationary focus. Consequently, each decision the participant makes causes a move into a distinctive realm of possibilities, for himself as well as for the one standing outside the work and the body.

In this chapter my intention is to demonstrate that although visibility is involved inside *Penetration*, non-visual sensations and experiences are also implicated in its relational mode in an innovative way. Accordingly, I will examine what approach Messenger adopts and how she brings touch inside the work.

1) Looking and Touching

In this section my intention is not to oppose one way of apprehending the work against another but rather what I am interested in is clarifying how vision and touch work in the aesthetic experience, as well as in understanding how both are implicated in each other. That is, I am not concerned in posing a binary of vision and touch, but rather in examining how *Penetration* combines both sensual experiences. While the visual gives

trajectories involving the viewer and the depth of the work, touch allows for felt dimensionality of a spatial context.

a) Vision as Touching

How we appreciate our senses varies from culture to culture however the way we use our senses remains constant. Because of the significant array and variability of visual practices, many scholars have claimed certain cultures or ages have been “ocularcentric” or “dominated” by vision.

Starting with French Philosopher, Michel Foucault a shift occurred. Since Foucault’s work has had a profound impact on thinking about the social constructions of the body and vision, a brief overview of some of his premises needs to be brought up. For Foucault¹⁹³ the body became a problematic notion: a site of power. His concern was with the historical conception of the body - or with those discourses of the body that are always historically situated. What Foucault brought to the history of the body is that the body as an object, target and instrument of power. What he taught us is that the body is a historical reality as well as the manifestation of relations of power. In conclusion, Foucault is at the origin of today’s understanding of the body as both a biological and political entity.

¹⁹³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, an Introduction* [1976] (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)

First published in 1975, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*¹⁹⁴ is an account of the emergence of a practice of vision which returns to the analysis of single discourse/institution relation that had provided the structure of his earlier studies of *Madness and Civilization*¹⁹⁵ and *The Birth of the Clinic*.¹⁹⁶ *Discipline and Punish* charts the origins of the prison and the development of modern penology during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, Foucault's analysis reaches far beyond his immediate subject matter. The broader theme of the book is the emergence of an entirely new form of power and means of domination that define, what he has labelled, a 'disciplinary society'.

Foucault examines the evolution from the invention of the spy-glass to the development of new techniques of surveillance based on the model of the military camp. The "Panopticon" was the perfect manifestation of disciplinary power and the principles of its functioning - if not replication of its architectural form - could be utilized in a variety of contexts other than the penal institutions for which it was intended. In this construction of uninterrupted visibility in which only the observer remains unseen, it becomes possible to compare individuals to each other and to impose a system of formal equality, thereby exercising a normalizing judgment. Foucault's work on the Panopticon and its various architectural and scientific technical descendants demonstrates the possible meaning of the microphysics of power and what it might mean to manufacture an individual.

¹⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975] (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977)

¹⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [1961] (New York: Pantheon, 1961)

¹⁹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* [1963] (New York: Pantheon, 1973)

According to him, the specific techniques of surveillance, documentation and administration of individuals that are constitutive of the forms of disciplinary power are the product of those new 'rationalities', those new kinds of knowledge about 'man', the human and social sciences. Accordingly, vision is at the center of power relations and identity formation.

Approximately twenty years later, in *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Martin Jay states that "vision (...) is normally the master sense of the modern era, variously described as the heyday of Cartesian perspectivalism, the age of the world picture, and the society of the spectacle or surveillance."¹⁹⁷ Methods and techniques were developed and established in order to extend the range of our vision, compensate for its imperfections or find substitutes for its limited powers. With that line of thought in mind, Postmodernism should be read as the hegemony of the visual as well as a questioning of the primacy of the visual. Whether because it is understood as the transformation of reality into images or because "it may paradoxically be at once the hypertrophy of the visual."¹⁹⁸ However, Jay's book has to do with demonstrating how vision, which had been considered as "the most noble of the senses," has been exposed to - in an ever-increasing way - a compelling examination by a significant number of thinkers. The twentieth-century French authors depreciated and questioned its dominance in Western culture, not only by expressing their doubts concerning its superiority as a means to access knowledge but simultaneously by

¹⁹⁷ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of vision in Twentieth-century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 543.

¹⁹⁸ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of vision in Twentieth-century French Thought*, id., 546.

denouncing its function as active tool in political and social oppression. Jay's position is one of mistrust regarding the domination of the visual sense, over the other senses, as a favoured means to grasp the sensible and/or cognitive world.

While the visual is continually probed, contemporary Western aesthetic is still almost exclusively visual. In spite of that, of the five senses, touch is the most urgent one. It is epidermal, temporal in nature and connected to the primacy of doing over contemplation. According to poet, essayist, and naturalist, Diane Ackerman "touch teaches us that life has depth and contour : it makes our sense of the world and ourself three-dimensional."¹⁹⁹ Although I am interested in the part of touch which is epidermic and present inside the work, I am similarly and simultaneously interested in how touch can also be a profound penetration into the core of someone's being. When we describe our emotions we express how things "touch us." *Penetration* is a work which involves tactility and which also touches the viewer on a distinct level.

Inside *Penetration* the affective engagement is initially visual. In *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay asserts that although the gaze alienates, the eye is always an organ of tactility and sensuous contact, where explicit and ready tactility between viewer and viewed exist as an optical unconscious. For Jay, seeing is a sensuous and tactile act. Vision is the place where our continuity with the world conceals itself, the place where we mistake our contact for distance, imagining that seeing is a substitute for, rather than a mode of, touching.

¹⁹⁹ Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York: Random House, 1990), 96.

The suggestion that the eye is an organ of tactility and that the gaze has a physical component, is not a contemporary one, and it is one which can be traced back to religious history. Early on, religious scholars have inquired a propos the senses. Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, affirm in “Introduction: Art and Science – a Model of a New Dynamic Interrelation” that “when we look back into the history of science we must recognize the resounding influence of Thomas Aquinas, who established a scientific framework during the Middle Ages based on a combination of Aristotelian principles and the precepts of the Christian church.” Thomas Aquinas²⁰⁰ considered ‘touch’ to be the foundation of all the other senses to the degree that each sense could be said to involve touch. Aquinas understood that each sense implicated contact with, or touched, the world in a manner specific to it. He also assessed that amongst all the animals man was the most perceptive in his sense of touch and that the most intelligent men were the ones that were the most touch perceptive. According to him, hands and the sense of touch remain essentially body while however expressing soul. They express ‘being in the world’ in the mode which is particular to them - a material mode, a mode which, although material, is in no way confined by its corporeality, but rather requiring it, and which is able to speak in a way that exceeds the powers of the intellect alone.

In the history of spirituality the Doctrine of the Spiritual Senses represents a means of describing the act of contemplation by reference to the five senses. What is most interesting is that the spiritual act par excellence - that is contemplation - is depicted as

²⁰⁰ Thomas Aquinas. Philosopher, theologian, doctor of the Church (*Angelicus Doctor*), patron of Catholic universities, colleges, and schools. Born at Rocca Secca in the Kingdom of Naples, 1225 or 1227; died at Fossa Nuova, 7 March, 1274.

belonging to the physical, to the body and its five senses; and the highest expression of the spiritual senses is what might be considered - as it is by Aquinas - its most basic sense: that of touch. It is precisely by reason of the immediacy of its knowledge that touch is evocative of the total 'possession' of the mystical state. To touch is to make immediate contact without intervention or distance. The sense of sight, with its attendant theories of "illumination" as representative of contemplation may perhaps come more readily to mind. But sight still implies a distance between the object and the one who perceives. Touch transcends this distance in contact, in possession of its object. It does not examine at length, from afar, but knows immediately by experience.

For the medieval Doctor of the Spiritual Senses Saint Bonaventure²⁰¹ touch surpasses sight because of its unitive function. Thus the most fundamental and basic of the senses is likewise that which is the most perfect and the most spiritual. Plotinus²⁰² also describes the act of contemplation as an act of touching when all distance is eliminated even to the distance between the object of perception and he who perceives. Even though this changes drastically after the Reformation, it is not by chance, notes Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, "that the sense of touch is used in preference to that of sight representing communion with God, a sense of a possession which produces satisfaction in a joy at once intimate and profound."²⁰³

²⁰¹ Saint Bonaventure. Doctor of the Church, Cardinal-Bishop of Albano, Minister General of the Friars Minor, born at Bagnorea in the vicinity of Viterbo in 1221; died at Lyons, 16 July, 1274.

²⁰² Plotinus, a native of Lycopolis in Egypt, who lived from 205 to 270 was the first systematic philosopher of the school of Neo-Platonism.

²⁰³ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. Translated by William V. Dych (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978.)

What is interesting to distinguish is that sight and touch are discussed with a similar approach by psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, when he examines sexuality. In “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905) Freud remarks that “seeing . . . is ultimately derived from touching.”²⁰⁴ For Freud:

“Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused; indeed, natural selection counts upon the accessibility of this pathway [. . .] when it encourages the development of beauty in the sexual object. The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts. It can, however, be diverted (‘sublimated’) in the direction of art [. . .] This pleasure in looking (scopophilia) becomes a perversion (a) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with the overriding or disgust [. . .] or (c) if, instead of being *preparatory* to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it.”²⁰⁵

b) Seeing as Touching

As it has been established previously, amongst the phenomenological thinkers Maurice Merleau-Ponty has had the most influence on recent work. Merleau-Ponty defined phenomenology as a science of beginnings, and so insisted that the starting point for philosophical, historical, and cultural analysis of how we are in the world of perception. Other phenomenological writers have explored the further significance of lived space, but none have paid as much attention as Merleau-Ponty to the way the lived body works into places in their felt intimacy.

²⁰⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905), *Standard Edition*, vol. 7 (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), 156-57.

²⁰⁵ Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905), *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, id., 156-57.

In his writings Merleau-Ponty allocated an important role to the lived body - to its actively expressive movements, its orienting capacity and its living powers. According to him, perception is a basic bodily experience, where the body is not an object but a subject, and where embodiment is the condition for us to have any objects - that is, to objectify reality (in the first place). As Eric Matthews argues, “what we mean by a world is not something we merely contemplate but something we *inhabit*. This is in the vaguest and most general terms what Merleau-Ponty means when he asserts as a central theme of his philosophy, that as experiencing subjects our being is necessarily ‘being-in-the-world’.”²⁰⁶ This is a valuable principle when analyzing *Penetration*.

For Merleau-Ponty, between touching and being touched, between seeing and being seen there is a fundamental reversibility. In the case of tactile perception, the subject is implicated in its objects and the objects are at least partially constitutive of the subject. It is on the basis of that model - of double sensation: the “toucher” is always “touched” - that Merleau-Ponty frames his arguments regarding the seer and the visible. For Merleau-Ponty every body is an object for others. He clarifies: “I can only touch or see, because I am touched and seen.”²⁰⁷ As Douglas Low alleges, Merleau-Ponty’s body is “lived through, is phenomenal is experienced from the inside as it opens to the outside. Yet this body is also experienced from the outside...” Following his examination he goes on and maintains “in fact, it is the opening between the body as touching and the body as

²⁰⁶ Eric Matthews, *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 2002), 45.

²⁰⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Claude Lefort Ed. Translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 133.

touched, as perceiving and as perceived that actually makes experience possible, that opens the body to the awareness of the outside world.”²⁰⁸ In traditional understandings of vision, the seer sees at a distance and is not implicated in what is seen. According to Merleau-Ponty however, the seer’s visibility conditions vision itself. To see, then, is also, by implication to be seen.

Merleau-Ponty’s definition of vision is to be distinguished from his use of the term sight. According to him, to have sight is simply the physical fact of being able to see, but to have vision is to have a sense of the perceptual field in which we ourselves are located as a sensible sentient amongst others. To have vision is to be able to see ourselves as an object amongst others situated in the world of other things and also sensible sentient things. Having vision is predicated on the fact that we are aware of others seeing us as we can see them, and thus we are able to see ourselves as others see us. Perception, then, is intricately bound up in our belonging to both a perceptual field and to a social world, so that these elements are themselves enveloped in one another as different dimensions of the world. Accordingly, for Merleau-Ponty vision happens in the world. We do not simply see the world, it also shows itself to us. In these terms we are the place through which the world comes to visibility, and our seeing is therefore not simply our own.

Inside *Penetration* the contact between the viewer and the viewed is literal and explicit. Invited to cross the line between observer and participant and actually engage and affect the piece as it unfolds the participant is being watched and judged by his or her peers.

²⁰⁸ Douglas Low, *Merleau-Ponty’s Last Vision: A Proposal for the Completion of The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 25.

Undeniably, viewer and viewed are entangled in sensuous contact: sensuously complicit in the scene because bodies are engaged. For humans living in close proximity and dependent on one another for survival, direction of gaze is an effective form of communication, whether in the form of the predatory gaze, the insistent look, or the look of love. Inside the installation the viewer is engaged in an obvious sensuous act as he is actively participating in the act of looking. Then again one could question the viewed's sensuous engagement as he does not make eye contact with the viewer - has he or she is focused in his or her own experience of viewing. Yet, it is only because he or she is conscious of his or her being looked-at-ness that he or she becomes engaged sensuously.

c) Touching

Inside *Penetration*, besides being visual, the contact is also physical. Upon entering the work the viewer moves into, inside the body and is unavoidably going to touch the organs. This contact is, as I understand it, sensuous and shouldn't be regarded as brutal because the form of tactility (felt) within the work is one that reassures. What the viewer comes to realize is that the stuffed fabric anatomical parts are soft, that they move, but above all that it is through his or her own participation that the installation becomes animated. Consequently, it is upon the viewers' entry and penetration inside the work, that the body, becomes cohesive and comes to life.

In "Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics" Jennifer Fisher argues that

"the haptic sense, comprising the tactile, kinæsthetic and proprioceptive senses, describes aspects of engagement that are qualitatively distinct from the capabilities of the visual sense. Where the visual sense permits a transcendent, distant and arguably disconnected, point-of-view, the haptic sense functions by contiguity, contact and resonance. The haptic

sense renders the surfaces of the body porous, being perceived at once inside, on the skin's surface, and in external space. It enables the perception of weight, pressure, balance, temperature, vibration and presence."²⁰⁹

This observation can actually apply to *Penetration*. As such, the installation is to be experienced in various ways. First, it is visually encountered - unless the person visiting the exhibition is visually impaired - and secondly it is bodily physically experienced. Accordingly, the forms of engagement that the two ways of apprehending the work produce are distinct from one another. And this is what I believe is unusual in Messenger's installation: the fact that the representation of the human body can be observed, perceived and penetrated, entered, felt and touched: embodied.

In *Body and Images*, Gail Weiss argues that "the very notion of embodiment suggests an experience that is constantly in the making that is continually being constituted and reconstituted from one moment to the next. To talk about modes of embodiment therefore is not to invoke a set of Kantian categories, absolute and inviolable, but rather, to talk about modes that are themselves continually changing in significance and appearance over time."²¹⁰ Keeping in mind that the possibility of individuation, that the creation of the individual that we understand as the core of the ideological structure of Western culture, has as its condition of possibility a particular mode of inhabiting the world as bodily beings, when examining *Penetration*, one question arises: what does *Penetration* imply vis-à-vis embodiment?

²⁰⁹ Jennifer Fisher, "Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics," *Parachute*, #87 (Summer 1997), 4-11.

²¹⁰ Gail Weiss, *Body Images. Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 43.

Given that Messenger places the viewer inside the work, within the viscera, where multiple organs and a foetus hang to form a womblike arrangement and as our way of inhabiting the world shapes or individuation, does *Penetration* signify that the viewer's experience is one which confronts him and/or her to his and/or her sense of self, therefore shaping it? Doesn't the work question our appreciation, recognition and our consciousness of our bodies and that of others? Doesn't *Penetration* question our sense of self as bodies, as organs, as individuals in relationships to others, as sexual beings...?

As aforementioned, what I believe Messenger is accomplishing by immersing the viewer inside the body is to re-establish notions of embodiment and re-map human experience.

2) The Body and Religious Tradition

Touch can also be perceived and sensed inside *Penetration* through the religious citation. Throughout her artistic practice Annette Messenger has moved away from stereotypes and archetypes by invoking a combination: a celebration of the shocking and the pleasing united in compelling compositions. To subvert the original meanings of her starting points she uses irony, and draws her imagery and method into a dialogue about artistic intentions and aspirations. As she stated in a 1988 interview given to Bernard Mercadé: "Conceptual art interests me in the same way as the art of the insane, astrology, and religious art. It's not the ideologies which these areas perpetuate [that] interest me: they

are for me, above all else, repertoires of forms. I make fun of sorcery and alchemy even if I make full use of their signs....”²¹¹

As the lighting gave the work a mystical array, the accumulation of body parts is not without recalling the religious relics and ex-votos. With her recompositions of fractured bodies, Messenger reiterates the iconography of Christian relics. As aforementioned, *Penetration* puts the emphasis on bodily mortification. In fact, the individual organs, which are attached to the ceiling with a length of string, resemble devotional offerings found in chapels and pilgrimage places. Bordering visually on the religious ex-votos and on the veneration of relics, the organs also evoke the practice connected to them: the suggestion that they can be touched.

The term “ex-voto,” from the Latin “ex voto suscepto” meaning “for a wish fulfilled” usually refers to a Catholic practice²¹² dating back to the Middle Ages (to an ancient custom that survived down to contemporary times.) However, the use of body parts is quite ancient in Europe, and it has taken a great many different forms. In his 1922 study of the Sir Henry Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, M.B.E. curator, Charles John Samuel Thompson affirms that “The custom of making votive offerings, which dates back to a period of great antiquity, probably had its origin in the varied offerings made to the dead by the ancient Egyptians and early Greeks, who placed in their tombs miniature

²¹¹ Annette Messenger quoted in Bernard Mercadé, “Annette Messenger,” *Bomb* 26 (Winter 1988-89): 32.

²¹² In Christian use, the term refers to an object that is created to thank the Virgin Mary or a saint for favors received.

weapons, models of utensils and other objects which had belonged to the deceased, with the idea that they might require them in the “unknown” to which they had departed.”²¹³

Most of the Greek temples dedicated to the gods of healing were richly decorated buildings. In the outer court were placed or hung the votive tablets in marble, stone, wood or clay. Sometimes they took the form of a painting depicting the healing of the afflicted donor, at others portraits of the divinities or their givers. The votive offerings were also suspended from the walls or ceiling or scattered around the sides of the deities, each of them telling the same tale of human suffering and the charity of the divinity. Looking back on ancient practices can be quite valuable to understand *Penetration*. Since Messenger’s body parts are hung from the ceiling of the gallery space we can associate them to the Roman ex-votos. However, because they evoke this past custom can we assume that these organs tell the same tale of suffering and charity?

In the *Antiqua Medicina: Aspects in Ancient Medicine* exhibition held at the University of Virginia in 1997²¹⁴, a thorough analysis of the cult centers which sprang up across the Mediterranean in antiquity is accomplished. Study of the terra cottas from each area reveals the emergence of some specialized centers in healing as well as reveal for us what the Romans knew of anatomy. Ex-votos from shrines in Roman Italy included legs and feet, hands and eyes, breasts and wombs, and male genitals. They depicted parts of the

²¹³ Charles Thompson and John Samuel, *Greco-roman votive offerings for health in the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum* (London: Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1922)

²¹⁴ *Antiqua Medicina: From Homer to Vesalius* an online exhibition prepared in conjunction with the Colloquium *Antiqua Medicina: Aspects in Ancient Medicine* held McLeod Hall, at the Health System of the University of Virginia on February 27, 1997.

human body, often at greater than life size, that were dedicated by the afflicted at healing sanctuaries. These mundane bodily extremities and internal organs formed a counterpoint to the idealized whole bodies of ancient divinities and athletes. The latter were executed in marble and bronze - in transformative materials - whereas the terra cotta ex-votos provided realistic simulations, their reddish color and rough surface texture approximating those of real body parts. These fragments were meant for viewing and their intact surfaces invited scopophilia. The ex-votos were offerings to the gods and represented imitations that suggested healings and placed the healed member under the protection of the deity at whose shrine they were presented. There, they signified the possibility of healing to all comers.

Male genitals were common ex-votos at certain shrines but, as antiques, they have been collected and often categorized as “obscene” in the past. Genitals and breasts, as much as internal gynecological organs, are metonyms for fertility and fecundity. However, according to Madeline H. Caviness²¹⁵, the participation of these ex-votos in a discourse of sexuality is threatened, since they are severed from the whole body.

Since, Messenger introduces a foetus - at three-stages of its growth - within the installation, can we presume that it is a metonym for fecundity or should we read it as evoking something else? When asked about the presence of the foetus inside the composition, Messenger stays quite elusive. The only mention made by the artist is one which suggests a relationship between the organs and dolls. Haunted by the notion of the

²¹⁵ Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle-Ages. Sight, spectacle and scopic economy*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.)

possible body, the doll is the female archetype by excellence. As Catherine Grenier asserts in her monograph on Annette Messenger, “the doll is commonly used to refer to the artificiality, the lack of maturity, and even, on a somewhat different level, the malevolence supposedly inherent in the female personality.”²¹⁶ In other words, the doll is a vehicle for desire, a need to own and control an object, like a voodoo doll, to summon up the spirit it symbolises. With this line of thought in mind, does this mean that Messenger’s association of the foetus with doll entail a desire of ownership and control?

a) The Foetus and the Feminine

Firstly, the presence of the foetus could be interpreted as and associated to fecundity and the female body. Inside *Penetration* Messenger’s dolls could be the “victims” of today’s culture, woman made for a role-play situation and thus they would perform an idealised simulation of creation. However, given that sex typically refers to biological components and it generally includes genitals and other physiological features ascribed to males and females, Messenger’s body is a sexualized body.

In the review he wrote about the *Islands: Contemporary Installations* exhibition, art critic Michael Desmond stated that “both the loss through miscarriage or abortion and the generative power of the female body are here,” present in *Penetration*. However, since the artist hasn’t confirmed this assertion I believe this position to be quite subjective. Nevertheless, such a commentary needs to be mentioned, as it exemplifies, how in our contemporary society the sight of a foetus outside its place of growth, leaves people puzzled and entails interpretation.

²¹⁶ Catherine Grenier, *Annette Messenger*, id., 51.

Historically, in the conventional “masculinist” imagination, women have been determined by their bodies. In terms of women’s historical oppression and disempowerment, a series of justificatory strategies are founded in the linking of the feminine to a body that is peculiarly and uniquely unreliable. The very fact that women are able to menstruate, to develop another body unseen within their own, to give birth, and to lactate is enough to suggest a potentially dangerous volatility that marks the female body as out of control. Because Messenger’s body appears to be “expecting” it can be assumed that the body is female. In addition, the correlation of the body inside *Penetration* with the womb is also one which links the installation to Woman’s body. Interest in the female womb can be traced back to antiquity. According to Professor of Greek history and epigraphy Sheila L. Ager the female womb was particularly curious, fascinating, and troubling to the medical writers of antiquity²¹⁷. Since it was an item lacking in the male body, the male-dominated medical establishment was never quite able to bring it into the “norm” of human anatomy. According to the Greeks, females were always alien and the “other.” The fact that the male body had no place for a womb may explain one of the most unusual of ancient medical fallacies: the wandering womb. Since the male body was the norm of human nature, and since it clearly had no place for a uterus, it may have been thought that the female body had no true place for a uterus either - hence the itinerant nature of the organ. According to many writers (from the Hippocratics in the Classical age of Greece to the physician Aretaios during the Roman Empire) a woman’s womb was liable to detach itself from its regular home and wander off at will through her body. Little could be done to prevent such an alarming and

²¹⁷ S. L. Ager, *The Wandering Womb*, University of Waterloo, (online article).

potentially fatal disorder (the womb at its most savage stage could actually choke its host to death - hysterical suffocation - since the displaced womb would deprive the body of breath) but possible remedies existed. With good fortune, the travelling womb would find its way back home.²¹⁸

The womblike feeling which emanates from *Penetration* is evident. Although *Penetration* is not a faithful representation of a womb, the presence of the foetus inside the composition ties the arrangement (closely) to a womb. Interestingly, the Greek hypothesis of the wandering womb is a notion that cannot literally be embraced for the study at hand however I believe it needs mention and expanding on.

Firstly, by travelling in retrospectives and exhibitions, *Penetration* changes surroundings and symbolically, changes skin, consequently the “womb” can be said to wander. Secondly, although *Penetration*’s “womb” doesn’t physically move, the viewers who travel inside the composition and within the “womb” do, like infants inside the mother’s abdomen.

Additionally, since the represented body is one which is permeable - as the viewer can enter it no matter what - it can easily be associated to a woman’s body whose boundaries have been established as being never fixed nor secure. For French feminist thinker Julia Kristeva, the abject body is the body which has lost its integrity, that which does not

²¹⁸ A disorderly womb could be coaxed back into position by the application of various odours. It was also believed that migrations of a similar nature could be prevented by keeping the woman pregnant. Since, as far as the medical establishment of antiquity was concerned, a pregnant uterus was a happy uterus and consequently a happy uterus had no reason to wander.

“respect borders, positions, rules” that which “disturbs identity, system, order.”²¹⁹

Because of its maternal functions - with reproduction making clear that the woman's body has a propensity to leak, to overflow the divisions between self and other, to contaminate and engulf - the body of woman acknowledges its “debt to nature” and consequently is more likely to signify the abject. As such *Penetration* constructs a border between what Kristeva refers to as “the clean and proper body” - the static body - and the abject body, or the body which has lost its integrity: i.e. the penetrated body.

Furthermore, as the sentiment which stems from the work is a womblike feeling and since the age-old relation between hysteria and the womb - called *hystera* in Greek - is one which marks femininity with irrationality, Messenger's body can clearly be linked to the feminine.

However, inside *Penetration* both male and female sexual organs are represented and combined. Since the body Messenger represents is neither male nor female but rather ambiguous since both sexual organs are represented inside the arrangement the question which comes to mind is: what kind of body is Messenger representing? Because, in Western society, the sexes are represented according to a binary structure that reduces *n-sexes* to two, the binary structure reduces one term within the pair to a position significantly dependent on the other, being defined as its negation, absence or lack. In referencing the human form and their specificities Messenger uses ambiguity to free gendered bodies from fixed meaning.

²¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

What I contend Messenger is saying is that there is not a single body but rather a multitude of bodies, marked not simply by sex, but by an infinite array of differences none of which is entirely determined. In *Penetration* the universal standardized medical body fades away in favour of a fluid and open embodiment. I believe that the message inside the work is, since the work can be penetrated at any given moment, it is always marked corporeally in specific ways. Messenger's body is never fixed - since the arrangement of the body parts varies from one installation/museum/gallery to another - and never represented as an unchanging or unchangeable fixture since it can or not be penetrated. Like the real body, Messenger's body evolves and transforms. As a result of the viewer's participation, the work takes on new forms and a new density.

Secondly, since the installation is so crowded with body parts, inside the arrangement, the foetus is configured as no more than a part of the construction. By way of her composition I believe Messenger is saying that all the organs start off simply as body parts waiting to be detached. Separated from the body, the foetus has an identity of its own, but it is also reduced to the level of a detachable organ. Unrelated to the site of its growth, the foetus gains a separate identity by being disembodied. By trying to reduce the body to an organism, a sum of detachable parts, Messenger implies that the body is but that. For Messenger, what you see and touch is what you get.

Messenger's artificial construction of the human body in parts and pieces - as hybrid: both male and female - is regarded as a naturally deviant sexual anomaly. Within Western societies all people are assumed to be either male or female. We do not recognize a

‘person,’ we recognize a ‘female person’ or ‘male person’. These beliefs constitute the normative conceptions of our culture with respect to the properties of normally sexed persons. However, Messenger’s body is appealing since it exalts the viewer’s curiosity, raises issues for the canon - male versus female body - and civil law as well as poses a problem for medical jurisprudence as it can be considered as medical phenomena and may serve as a foundational test case for an analysis of constructions of gender since it questions the social organization in basic ways.

b) The Organs as Votive Offerings

Now, my initial argument was that *Penetration* recalls religious ex-votos. Isn’t it curious how the custom of making gifts for recovery from disease to favour certain deities supposed to preside over the affliction has continued throughout the Middle-Ages down to the present day? Although the Reformation impacted such practices the custom lived through time.

Shrines, healing springs and wells said to possess healing properties have been sought by sufferers in search of relief to place gifts of money or in kind at the healing shrine.

In Turkey, votive offerings of silver and other metal, representing the eyes, hands, heads, feet and complete figures of the human body are still offered in the Greek churches on recovery from sickness. Similar votive offerings are used in Peru, Spain, Italy, Belgium and the Canary Islands. In Portugal, where smallpox is still common, votive offerings of

various parts of the body modeled in wax, spotted in color to indicate the eruptions, are still sold and found hanging in the churches.

Modern-day ex-votos, as used in Latin America for instance, though often wooden and unpainted, may include abstracted upper torsos and whole figures along with the many hands, arms, feet, legs, heads, lower torsos, and breasts (Fig. 74-75). Known as *milagres* (miracles), a few are painted, and some are made of wax, clay, metal, or plastic. Far from being modeled on the individual part, like the wax pieces of antiquity, these are no longer personal. They are often pre-prepared and sometimes even rented rather than bought²²⁰. As a religious practice, ex-votos can also be touched. In order to prevent an illness from occurring the devout will buy or rent a body part, bring it to the place of worship, touch it, pray to it and place it amongst other objects.

According to local scholars, in certain regions of the world the offerings reflect regional medical and social problems and are often used by academics to formulate public health policies. Interviewed by the journalist, Alex Bellos for the *Caninde Guardian*, Brazilian Doctor Adalberto Barreto declared, in November 2000, that “the ex-votos reflect the social reality of the north-easterner. In each ex-voto there is a story of a victory, of a problem being overcome”. In addition, he affirmed: “for example, when we noticed a reduction of polio legs, it showed that the anti-polio campaigns are getting better.”²²¹

²²⁰ Marion Oettinger Jr., *The Folk Art of Latin America: Visiones del Pueblo* (New York: Dutton Studio Books and the Museum of American Folk Art, 1992), 29-30 and 38-43.

²²¹ Alex Bellos, “Brazilians’ gifts to saint leave a body of evidence”, *Caninde Guardian* (November 27, 2000.)

With all these considerations in mind how should Annette Messenger's composition be understood? Should the body parts be read as offerings that reveal what Doctor Barreto identifies as the "story of a victory" where the organs tell a tale of suffering and charity? Resembling the ancient ex-votos, the organs of *Penetration* are represented larger than life and hanging from the ceiling: meant for viewing and consequently inviting scopophilia. Like the religious artefacts, Messenger's organs are simulations that are meant to be looked at and touched. But can we go to the extent of declaring that *Penetration* reflects social reality? If so, what kind of story is Messenger telling? Is Messenger renewing medical imagery - and thus the contemporary reading of the body - by way of re-introducing the notions of the fantastic within the image and/or is she questioning the representation and understanding of the gendered body - in particular woman's body - in today's Western society while inquiring notions of embodiment, identity and touch?

The body considered is the artist's body and our own - the viewer's own. The art experience has always been based on empathy: i.e. on the identification of the self with the other. In body-works - works based on and rooted in the body - that consideration is pushed even further. With *Penetration* the contiguity established with the spectator's own space amounts to an exercise of self-identification. A self-identification which is very intimate. The viewers enter a body - that of another; an hybrid other - and actually penetrate another's intimacy; however, the parts remind them of their own parts and it is as such that *Penetration* stimulates their sense of having a body while simultaneously being a body.

Although Messenger encourages the viewers to enter, act and follow the path she has designed, the viewers - both, those who choose to enter as well as those who decide to stay outside - experience and touch the composition with their own bodies - whether it be with their eyes or their skin. What I believe makes *Penetration* an important work is that because of the structure of the work as well as its title, the body is exposed.

Starting from the standardized anatomical model, Messenger constructs a body that is ambiguous: a body placed in the in-between. In-between sexes, in-between genders, in-between life and death, in-between religion and secularism... Thus, Messenger's construction leaves room for interpretation. Although, the body exemplified is shown and performed by the participants who bring it into movement isn't the experience inside the work, however, a personal and unique experience where each participant may relate to the generic body parts on different levels?

3) Anatomy and *Penetration* as Craft

Touch is also incorporated within the work through the use of material - kapok - and because of the proximity with which the elements are arranged.

As I have argued in "From Flat Anatomy to a Three-Dimensional Body, " pictorial anatomies were illustrated by professional artist-engravers, who worked in a number of different areas of print publishing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the eighteenth century however, a new profession arose - that of specialist medical artists -

and since the nineteenth century, specialist medical illustrators²²² have worked with anatomists and illustrated publications rather than fine artists.²²³ I would like to elaborate on the assertion that although medical illustration is considered a profession (today), it was regarded as a craft in the past. Anatomical drawing required artistic manual skill. However, until the new profession arose, it was not considered an art form since it didn't require any instruction (Art being by definition a skill acquired by study or practice). The debate between art versus craft is not one that I will be expanding upon here. Nonetheless, I believe that the obvious bias that exists between the words craft - which tends to be recognized as alluding to manual skill - and art - which is understood as leaning towards what are now considered "higher" forms of creativity - is interesting to call attention to for the study at hand. Since *Penetration* is a textile installation, the connection between the work and craft is one that is manifest. When examining the installation, knitting and sewing bring us back to the domestic basis of the art work. Although Messenger uses materials (for all her works) that can be found inside the home - coloured crayons, cloth, stockings, nets, sewing material, newspaper clippings, everything that arrives into the home and stays - it is the side of the home which is a microcosm, a world in reduction rather than the feminine domestic side of it that is of

²²² Max Brodel founded and subsequently directed the first medical illustration program in the world at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1911. In 1945, The Association of Medical Illustrators (AMI) was founded and by 1967, the AMI established a set of educational standards to be used toward the accreditation of graduate programs in medical illustration. Their motto is "Draw what can't be seen, watch what's never been done, and tell thousands about it without saying a word".

²²³ Deanna Petherbridge and Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Quick and the Dead. Artists and Anatomists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 14.

interest to her. Yet, as Catherine Grenier argues “home is the seminal model. The keystone of the entire oeuvre.”²²⁴

Although the connection of the word craft to leisure or recreational activities appears to be very recent it is one that women artists of the 1970s took on only to discard as their objective was to abolish the distinction between craft and art and to reject the dichotomy that previously existed between those two artistic methods. As feminist art historian Whitney Chadwick argues in *Women, Art and Society* “women in the arts began raising questions from where to exhibit as women and how to find space for working, to political, theoretical, and aesthetic issues.”²²⁵ Women started looking for forms that would valorize their own experience as women. One of the many ways they chose to expand definitions of form and materials was through their association with women’s cultural traditions.²²⁶ Later in the book, Chadwick affirms that “the idea of using fabric as an art material both summed up the iconoclasm of the 1970s and established a context within which to mount a feminist challenge to the way art history honoured certain materials and certain processes instead of others.”²²⁷

While Messenger refuses to coin herself a Feminist Artist she however acknowledges the fact that it is very different to exist as a woman artist than as a male artist in France. In an interview given in 1995 to the journalist Natasha Leoff, Messenger states that “things are

²²⁴ Catherine Grenier. *Annette Messenger*, id., 63.

²²⁵ Whitney, Chadwick. *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 321.

²²⁶ Whitney, Chadwick. *Women, Art and Society*, id., 331.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 332.

automatically stuck, grafted onto the woman because it is still not completely accepted to be a woman artist. We are always looking at her life, linking her work to her life (...) A woman artist's work is looked at through her cultural position and everything becomes mixed up.”²²⁸

In *The Feminist Tradition of Mary Shelley and Annette Messenger*, Orianne Smith Professor of English who is an authority on eighteenth and nineteenth century British literature and culture, argues that “like art, science favours a hierarchical structure that endorses a paternalist view of the natural world.”²²⁹ She also asserts that “throughout her career, Messenger has been deeply concerned with the devaluation of the feminine in art. Her incorporation of what is considered women's work like sewing and embroidery and her use of abandoned objects such as real and toy stuffed animals, as well as traditionally feminine materials, like yarn and fabric, reflect her commitment to art that explores the fate of the margins of the canon - women, children and animals.”²³⁰

Annette Messenger's use of wool and kapok should be read with that line of reasoning in mind. As many women artists had done before her, Messenger uses materials uncommon in the history of sculpture to form objects which are tactile and suggestive, and which also rely on an abstract formal language. And as such, her choice of material and the use

²²⁸ Natasha, Leoff, “Annette Messenger,” *Contemporary Art Journal Online*, 1995.

²²⁹ Orianne, Smith. “‘My Hideous Progeny’: Begetting Monsters in a Scientific Age.” *The Feminist Tradition of Mary Shelley and Annette Messenger*, Department of English, Loyola University Chicago Online.

²³⁰ Orianne, Smith. “Introduction.” *The Feminist Tradition of Mary Shelley and Annette Messenger*, Department of English, Loyola University Chicago Online.

of knitting and sewing (specifically female occupations) bring her art into the viewer's daily life and feminizes it.

The connection between *Penetration* and women's art does not however end here. With *Penetration* Messenger establishes a dialogue between the complexity and labour of women's traditional handicrafts and the traditional mainstream sculptural concerns such as those of scale and material. Messenger's organs are elements that require intensive sewing (such actions which are not without recalling a hidden history of female productivity in areas like needlework, sewing or doll making.) The association made between the organs and dolls is one that has been pointed out by the artist. Accordingly, we can impart that Messenger uses the double meanings of materials to explore issues such as the role of women in society and/or the social ideas of 'normality'. Simply by making art of women's work one can attest that Messenger focuses the viewer's attention on the making itself and on the bodies which engage in it.

With *Penetration*, Annette Messenger has made it possible for the viewer/participant to access the body's interior both visually and physically: to experience the work, participate and affect the art as it unfolds. By presenting and re-presenting the internal organs as she does she allows the viewer to cross a boundary that, to date had been unmanageable without the use of technology. Since the material is one that is familiar - one which reminds us of our school projects - and pleasing to the touch, the piece attracts the visitors' contact. Accordingly, Messenger's artistic method is one that enables the viewer to travel inside the body and experience it in a tactile fashion. What makes the

work tactile is the use of material and the mode of representation. Since *Penetration* recalls the stuffed toys used in earlier works and resembles an imaginative three-dimensional anatomical model the viewer is captivated by what he sees and feels. Although, larger than life and bigger than standard the organs are captivating and even “endearing” since they are meant to stir emotions and memories. For an adult, the installation is perhaps entertaining and pleasing to wander through, vaguely scary but too benign to be threatening. By reshaping and through incessant modifications I believe Messenger has formalized the concept of constant subjugation of the body, thus conditioning the spectator not to take offence, but rather constraining him or her to become familiar with it. Consequently, inside the work the viewer is motivated to touch the pieces. However, in the occurrence he isn’t interested in deliberately touching the organs, the proximity of the elements fosters contact. Messenger does not limit herself to a detailed study of selected parts, but rather develops a precise method of approaching the model, demanding close proximity which breaks the distance required inside the Museum space. Although Messenger supports making contact with the work - since she likes the viewers to brush up against the pieces²³¹ - in *Penetration*’s display directions - given by the artist to the National Gallery of Australia upon their acquisition of the piece - she specifies that she “doesn’t like them being deliberately pulled or swung.”²³² Obviously, appropriate behaviour within an exhibition setting, is to be upheld, and the type of contact which is encouraged has to be subtle and gentle.

²³¹ Excerpt from the notes taken by Micheline Ford during the installation of *Penetration* for the *Islands: Contemporary Installations* exhibition, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1996.

²³² Excerpt from the notes taken by Micheline Ford, id.

4) *Penetration* and Touch

At this point in the thesis it is apparent that Messenger introduces the sense of touch in order to create an experiential work. As I have previously mentioned, as the viewers wander inside the work, Messenger's way of filling space, and the things she fills it with, surround them in the most interesting way. I also determined that light and heat are central components of the installation piece. However, both elements can be studied and assessed in a new light.

Light has always been a component of visual art. With *Penetration*, Messenger explores form and vision and uses light in provocatively new and challenging ways in order to expand the enveloping experience inside the composition.

Messenger's organization of the lighting of the piece is quite significant. Using the simple white straight light and materials that can be purchased at any hardware store, Messenger creates a sculpture that affects the surrounding environment and the viewer who stands inside that space. While these bulbs are accessory to the work (as they do not come as part of the work) the artist has stipulated the need for the bulbs to be installed with the work.

In a dim lit room, alongside the body parts, a few bare bulbs are hung from long electrical cords at about one meter from the ground inside the composition. The dangling low-wattage bulbs, reminiscent of those used by Messenger's onetime collaborator Christian

Boltanski, illuminate the work from its inside in order to complete it. Suspended at the center of the room and the work, the lighting harmonizes the installation and gives it intensity. As abovementioned because of its arrangement, the strong selective lighting, ensuring a shadow effect occurs on the surrounding walls during display, gives an overall shadowy and kinetic feeling to the work. This mystical darkness not only prompts us to think of the liturgical context of the Catholic Church - for example, the illumination of icons - but also recalls popular superstitions, such as the idea that the realm of the dead is the realm of shadows (which has been discussed in a previous chapter.) Messenger draws playfully on these sacred traditions, on votive offerings, and on the theme of light and darkness in order to create a magical composition.

As the bare bulbs intervene in the work's totality, light is a condition of *Penetration's* presentation since it completes it. But what statement is Messenger making by placing bare bulbs within the composition? Actually, the presence of straightforward lighting gives the work a sense of crudeness where the lighting doesn't take away from the focus and spotlight that is put on the elements of the work. However, since the bulbs are exposed, the viewer who chooses to enter the work has to be careful about the heat which they emit. Although the light bulbs are small and their intensity is low, the lights release bright direct lighting in addition to heat. Finally, by placing them within the installation Messenger confronts the viewer to physicality: to his sense of space and to tactility.

Light affects our vision as it is what enables us to see. Seeing is possible only in light. Vision begins with light rays bouncing off the surface of objects. These reflected light

rays enter the eye and are transformed into electrical signals. Millions of signals per second leave the eye via the optic nerve and travel to the visual area of the brain. Brain cells then decode the signals into images, providing us with sight. Almost all animals respond to light but vertebrates have eyes and a brain that work together to process light into true images. Human vision is particularly unique in that the human brain can process visual images and use them to create language and pictures and to store information for future use. But why is light so important inside *Penetration* and how does it shape the work?

Although the bare bulbs create an intense effect inside the arrangement as well as onto the walls, the overall feeling is one of dimness where forms and images appear, dissolve, transform into the space as much as they alter the space itself. Although the bulbs are bare and bright, Messenger has deliberately chosen to include a few of them inside the arrangement such that she has created an overall dim feeling. By creating a diffused lighting, Messenger forces the viewer to experience the work in a particular way and to adapt to his or her surroundings on top of compensating for the lack of light with the other senses. This artistic experience feels distinctly experimental, and is reminiscent of the childhood experience of stumbling around, eyes closed, in attempting to experience the world without sight. In darkness, you cannot prepare yourself for the tactile experience. In *Penetration*, what results is an uncanny sort of tactile vertigo.

Penetration is one grand composition with different elements that dissolve into each other thanks to the lighting. While much of the installation is shrouded in darkness,

sudden pools of light illuminate certain specific elements. In the display instructions held by the National Gallery of Australia, Messenger specifies that “the lighting is important” and that “shadows of the organs need to be on the walls, in particular the foetuses.”²³³ In *Penetration*, power and intensity - intensity of the lighting as well as intensity of the message - is given (amongst other things) by the system of lighting.

With *Penetration*, Messenger has created an internal space of solid light. Her bare globes evoke the illumination of the religious places of worship and, more generally, the standard conceptual connection between light and truth, suggesting that light - and truth - if it is to be manifest in public action, has first to be realized in the viscera.

This fashion of organizing light is not new to Messenger. As it was shown in Paris, *Nameless Ones* (Anonymes, 1993) was the first work, of *The Pikes* series (Les Piques, 1991-1993) which required the participation of the viewer’s whole body. Originally the series was composed of long metal rods or pikes onto which various objects were impaled which were placed around the exhibition space and leaned along stretches of walls. Whether presented in 1993, at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris or in 1996, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the pikes laid along two adjoining walls. In order for the viewer to experience the entirety of *Nameless Ones*, he or she had to enter the room and make his or her way between the metal poles (mounted in earth and surmounted by stuffed-animals that were coiffed by heads from soft toys) and the hanging bare bulbs.

²³³ The following are excerpts of the notes taken by Micheline Ford (in collaboration with Annette Messenger) during the installation of *Penetration* for the *Islands: Contemporary Installations* exhibition, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 31 August - 27 October 1996.

What is innovative with *Penetration*, in contrast to previous works, is that all the elements of the work are suspended from the ceiling. Like the organs, hanging by their strings, lights are arrested in their fall and abandoned in suspension. As you walk inside the composition you see numerous vertical possibilities that your eye can follow. In some instances certain vertical “lines” might stop at the same height and might be tinted the same color so your eye wonders horizontally. Inside the work colors and hues don’t vary much, more magenta and purple and brown than anything else, which in the dim light accounts for some of the hypnotic quality of the work.

The intensity the bare bulbs radiate comes from the straightforwardness of the lighting as well as from the fact they also radiate heat. The varying degrees of heat emitted by the bulbs along with the large size of the work merge the visual experience with a physical one. Apparently, because the light bulbs were set one meter from the ground and the public could touch them, during the *Islands: Contemporary Installations* exhibition, it became a safety issue, and the voltage was lowered with various transformers and low watt bulbs were used.²³⁴

Heat is something we know to be careful about. We are taught very early on in life that heat hurts and burns. We know not to get too close to it and we protect ourselves from it. By introducing globes that radiate high temperature, Messenger creates a space where the viewer has to be cautious. First, the viewer who chooses to penetrate the installation and who bumps into the light can get harmed. Although in certain instances measures were

²³⁴ *Islands: Contemporary Installations from Australia, Asia, Europe and America*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 31 August - 27 October 1996.

taken to adjust the situation (by lowering the wattage of the bulbs) the participant was still faced with the idea that touching the bulbs would burn. Accordingly, touch becomes an essential component of the work's construction. Secondly, for the viewer who chooses to enter but deliberately decides to avoid stumbling upon the bulbs, the game becomes one of, carefully, following the paths designed by the artist: a game of dodging the obstacles. Although, he or she isn't obligated to physically come into contact with the lighting, in actuality he or she might have to make an effort to intentionally evade contact with it says something about the viewer's relationship to the work and its elements as well as his relationship to physicality and touch.

Messenger introduces heat inside the work and consequently inside the body. Interestingly, the relationship between the human body and heat is not recent. In ancient times the belief that a difference in temperature existed between men and women could be found as early as Hippocrates. Following Hippocrates, some writers sought to explain the observable differences between men and women by means of sweeping theories such as the one Aristotle espoused. Aristotle thought that the reason women were women (and not men) was that they were too wet and cold. If only they had sufficient heat and dryness, they could "cook" themselves into men.

Later, the notion of "vital heat" was fundamental to Galen's understanding of the anatomical differences between female and male. The amount of "vital heat" produced by a specific body was viewed as a direct index of its place in the "great chain of being", a hierarchical order of rank according to degrees of perfection. Humans were seen as the

most perfect and thus hottest, while the male human was viewed as more perfect than the female due to their excess of heat.

From this perspective male and female genitals were not essentially different in kind but simply located in different places, one inside and one outside, each possessing identical elements. In *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and society in the Nineteenth Century*,²³⁵ Thomas Laqueur cites Galen and explains that, during Galen's time, men's excess of heat was explained as resulting in their reproductive organs being forced outside the body, while women's cooler constitution left them inside. "Turn outward the woman's, turn inward, so to speak, and fold double the man's, and you will find the same in both in every respect."²³⁶

Later in history, influential medical theorists and practitioners recognized the preposterous nature of these ideas. Today, it is common knowledge that the normal core body temperature of a healthy, resting adult human (male or female) is stated to be at 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit or 37.0 degrees Celsius. Though the body temperature measured on an individual can vary - due to an individual's metabolism rate, the time of day or the part of the body in which the temperature is measured at - a healthy human body can maintain a fairly consistent body temperature. Biologically, the association between heat and the body is apparent.

²³⁵ Thomas, Laqueur, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and society in the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 4.

²³⁶ Claudius Galen quoted in Thomas Laqueur, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 5.

The connection between internality and heat is also apparent inside *Penetration* and the heat which emanates from the bare bulbs holds a key role inside the composition, as has been demonstrated previously in this chapter.

Interestingly, *Penetration* recalls temperature in another way. Since, the opposite of heat is coldness and because the organs are displayed like meat, the arrangement is not without recalling a cold room where the pieces of meat hang side by side from metal hooks - as is has been explained in “*Penetration* and the History of Spectatorship in Art.” As such, Messenger represents the mortal body in a way that emphasizes its material and gross nature: where temperature and fluidity are conditions of the work. However, although *Penetration* seems to reduce the human body to meat, paradoxically it accomplishes just the opposite. The work acts as a signifier for the self or soul which relies upon the physical body. And Messenger produces a body where touch forms and transforms human experience - via the materials she utilizes.



Plate 74.

Nosse Senhor do Bofim

Salvador

Brazil

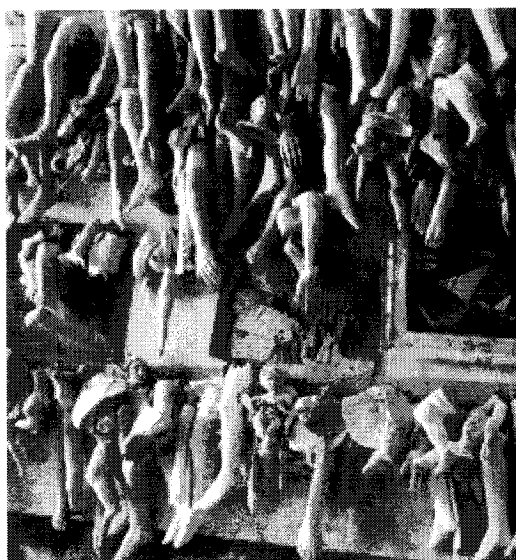


Plate 75.

Sanctuaire de San Alfio

Trescatagni

Sicily

CONCLUSION

With this thesis my intention has been to demonstrate how Annette Messenger has produced a unique type of body with *Penetration* and why the artist's specific comprehension and interpretation of the human body is one which needs to be considered.

Each culture has a theory of the body that determines anatomical descriptions. The pre-modern practice of dissection has however always been surrounded by moral anguish and legal constraints. Up until the mid sixteenth century, anatomical drawing was based largely on guesswork. In the last hundred years artists have contributed by improving the technical quality of their drawings and their illustrations have shown a progression from speculation to scientific accuracy. In addition, new technologies such as better dissecting methods and x-rays, for instance, have enabled vast improvements in anatomical drawings and representations.

From the classical Greek theoreticians who believed that an imbalance of the four humors caused illness (belief which ruled medical theory in the West from the first through the eighteenth centuries since it was assumed the humors-phlegm, black bile, yellow bile and blood were contained in all bodily fluids and that an excess or deficiency of one or more caused illness) to the Modern Western physicians' organization of the body into ten interdependent organ systems - each having a distinct function and all ten being

coordinated by chemical and nervous links - physicians have concerned themselves with the internal arrangement of the body for almost two thousand years.

Today, various artists return to the representation of the internal body. With *Penetration* Messenger has revealed her ability to equally acknowledge and transgress the limitations of the subject of anatomy as well as showed her capacity to challenge the medium of art. By choosing to represent the body in a visual language regulated by the medical field, Messenger deliberately positions herself within the history of medical representation. However, although the artist knowingly implicates her art in this scientific inheritance, she also takes on an active position as both cultural and political commentator since she breaks away from conventions on several levels.

Inside *Penetration* the body - as bounded and as the archetypal individual - is threatened: its boundaries have become permeable. The body is opened up to networks of influences, inside and out. What is shown in the installation is what we are made of - our organs - the body's precious remains presented in such a way that Messenger stated in 1995 that it "disturbs the viewer's mind"²³⁷ and reveals the obscenity of the body through a simple effect of language - through the work's title - *Penetration*.

Although *Penetration* is an adventure inside the body - an exploration into anatomy - two important elements make the artist's approach inside anatomy unusual. First, *Penetration* does not abide by the established order - as identified in anatomical history - as Messenger

²³⁷ Annette Messenger in an interview with Kate Davidson, by facsimile, September 1995 (trans. Patrice Riboust).

questions the traditional meanings of the body and embodiment (since the body is hybrid and penetrable) in order to stimulate the viewer to examine embodiment and corporality. Secondly, the work disregards traditional meanings of contemporary art since the artist consciously employs overlooked and devalued artistic methods - such as women's crafts for instance - to direct the viewer's attention away from the rules of art-making.

To begin with, *Messenger* does not follow the established order since the artist questions the body, its comprehension, its boundaries and its representation. *Messenger's* choice of the standardized anatomical vocabulary as well as her use of certain visual metaphors and common techniques found in medical illustration demonstrate her willingness to participate within the specific field of expertise of science - medicine - while simultaneously producing an artistic body. The artist has constructed a body that relies on anatomy. The anatomists were the first, whose treatises gave the body an interior image. They threw themselves into the opened body, where they extracted the best knowledge and restored to their greatest ability the human structure. With *Penetration* *Messenger* relies on past anatomical techniques in order to underline her understanding of the body and embodiment.

Because the installation can be correlated to past representations and positioned within the long tradition of anatomical imagery, *Penetration* is to be understood as being a contemporary version and interpretation of the medical atlases and dissection textbooks of the past. There is a taxonomic process of rationalization exposed in *Penetration* which involves seeing what can not normally be seen. By cutting into the space of the body,

Messenger penetrates it and starts re-ordering it and re-organizing it. *Penetration* shows the breaking down of the body into its constituent parts. The artist has pulled the body apart and anatomized it in order to firstly, understand the workings of the whole and to secondly, construct, re-structure and re-shape the body via the viewer's participation and touch.

In an age where technology has enabled us to look closer inside the body we have come to realize that the images that we are now confronted with have lost the notion of the imaginary. What is evident is that although new imaging technologies, used in medicine, do construct a new way of looking at the body in relation to space it simultaneously distances us from its real representation. In today's era, a fantasy of transparency has opened the human body to a number of visibilities, stripping and unveiling it like it had never been before. Then again, contemporary medical images extend the body-human dualism and achieve a tremendous fragmentation of the body by isolating the organs, the functions, even the cells or the molecules, driving the subject to disappear under the biological constraint that substitutes it.

Throughout the contemporary period, medicine's desire to know has been supported by a desire to see with the intention of overcoming the invisibility of the body and recording its images, leaving nothing unidentified. Before the nineteenth century, the imaginary unconscious projected on/in the representation was facilitated by the necessity of an artistic reproduction in the anatomical or clinical treatises. For the first time, with the invention of the x-ray, access inside the human body didn't require the death of the

human being as a necessary condition. Since the nineteen sixties, the panoply of medical imageries has multiplied its implications and has perfected its investigative tools as a result of the support of physics and computer science (photography and new media have tended to take over from drawings as the means of re-presenting the body.)

Today, the body is virtually saturated with the mechanical and analytic “eye”. Different techniques have introduced the time factor inside the image allowing us to follow in actual time, on a television screen, after computer processing, the path of a probe or a dye inside the body. The organ’s physiology is thus visually accessible. Where dissection had turned up new surfaces which did not correspond to familiar surfaces and which seemed to challenge conceptual systems established on the evidence of the latter - thereby introducing difference and antithesis into scientific thought - computer imaging have sought out deep inner structures that seem to resemble the whole.

According to Thomas Laqueur the contemporary Western cultural imperative to see, to reveal, to dissect, and to represent all of the visually produced unprecedented explosion of images of what laid beneath the surface led to two biologically opposite sexes which in turn determined gender roles.²³⁸ Interestingly, with *Penetration*, Annette Messager appropriates something a priori untouchable - body, gender, identity - and arranges it as she pleases by cutting up, isolating, enlarging, framing, tying up, decomposing and recomposing the pieces together. Obsessed with the way in which we catalogue, compartmentalize and translate the different aspects of experience (within ourselves),

²³⁸ Thomas Laqueur, “Clio Looks at Corporal Politics” in *Corporal Politics* (Boston: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1992), 18.

Annette Messenger instigated an innovative manner of seeing and developed her own image game - her own process of seeing, selecting and looking - in which the viewer/participant plays an essential role in the development of the work. Influenced by film and photographic framing, Messenger's images of the human body are cropped. According to her, film and photography have accustomed us to fractured sequences, details and close-ups. Consequently, her works are substantially influenced by those techniques of framing. In most of the artist's works, and in *Penetration* in particular, the human body is systematically fragmented into a personal repertoire. Recomposed so as to become a mere frame of the body - the pieces are grouped into a circle or make a line... - the fragments are used to explore the issue of identity, both collective and individual and their combination are hardly worthy of the ideas of conformity and normalcy.

In addition, inside her works Messenger insists on the multivalency of pleasures as she delimits the inscription of desire along the lines of gender. Interestingly, with *Penetration* the artist opens desire to possibilities beyond the gendered and purely sexualized array widely attributed, characterized and defined by 'required' heterosexuality as the elements that make the work are combinations of male and female organs.

With *Penetration* the body is highly objectified and de-contextualised and the organs are also placed side by side in random order - one which doesn't follow the customary order of representation found in anatomical imagery. Accordingly, this body is a refashioned and abstracted composition where each part (male and/or female, big and/or little...) holds an equivalent position. Annette Messenger's body is ambiguous and hybrid. Neither

male or female but rather male and female simultaneously. Consequently, Messenger's composition and body question notions of biology, normalcy and boundaries. In other words, inside the installation the monstrous and hybrid body, which far from overcoming mortality emblematically signifies mutability, articulates the work.

Secondly, inside *Penetration*, Messenger disregards traditional and contemporary meanings of art since the artist ignores new technologies. One aspect of the artist's installation piece that calls for exhaustive inquiry is her deliberately inclusive and non-hierarchical attitude towards the materials and the sources used. Via her selection of materials and artistic methods - installation art amongst others - the artist draws real life into her works and consequently blurs the line that divides art and everyday existence. Messenger mixes personal story and history, complex historically important art and ordinary practical activities, technical renderings and crude imagery, to facilitate and allow everything - every element of the work as well as every participant - an alternative existence. For instance, the organs when projected onto the walls take on a different appearance and the spectators when inside the composition transform the work's structure. Nothing is only and essentially what it seems.

While validated as an inquiry inside the body *Penetration* is simultaneously an investigation into an artistic style. With the installation Messenger has gone inside the body that she had spent so many years drawing and photographing close up. Although clearly related to Messenger's signature, this piece does not immediately look like a Messenger since it drops many attributes of the obsessiveness present in the earlier works -

the tiny repeating parts, the expressionistic workings... - and since it represents a spacious, almost lively effect that is unlike anything else the artist had done before. Consequently, *Penetration* is the first step into a new type of works. As a “penetrable,” *Penetration* is the first of a succession of works that will be entered and experienced physically and where the elements of the composition will hang from the ceiling and will be touched by the visitor.

In addition, with *Penetration*, Messenger honours the physical body as our primary means of experiencing the world, recognizing its infinite mystery as the vessel of life, and respecting its place within nature while simultaneously acknowledging the body as a political field on which external forces are disputed. What Messenger has done is made the viewers/participants aware of their physical reality. There is no escape when entering the installation, between objective seeing and subjective feeling. Inside *Penetration*, the viewer becomes a participant/actor by way of the sense of touch.

In Museums and art galleries the cardinal rule has always been “look, but do not touch” - a directive we’ve heard repeated incessantly since we’ve been children - and an instruction we sometimes have to remind ourselves of when encountering a work that draws us as adults. The value that emerges from the “depths” of this installation is exceptional in that it welcomes the momentum of bodies and the fondling of fingers. Designed for touch as the surface and the composition yearn for contact, *Penetration* focuses on notions of the body, on the relationship between the statistical and

non-statistical representations of the body, on questions of how technology (or non-technology) which mediate the representation and experience of the body, and as an extension, on the representation and experience of space and time.

Where anatomy offers sight and insight about the human being with *Penetration* Annette Messenger introduces the idea that touch is intrinsic to the understanding of the human body and that similar to anatomy, touch is essential and validates the measure of the human being. This work invites relationship through an experience grounded in proprioceptive knowledge, where skin implicates feeling, seeing is understood through touching, touching through seeing, all together integrated through attention. The viewer's action, the viewer's gesture, or even the viewer's presence may: overpower the body, expose the body, mark the body, collapse, embalm, arouse the body The bottom line is that *Penetration* is about sensuality and about relationships: about the body and what it means to have a body but above and beyond about what it means to be a body.

With *Penetration*, Messenger uses her subject and her media to explicitly refer to the mortality of the body whose resurrection she also seeks to perform. The body inside *Penetration* recalls the very body materiality. A body suspended between life and death where "dead" dangling internal organs "come to life" via the viewer's participation via his or her penetration. Consequently, *Penetration* emphasizes the sheer materiality of the body in simultaneous presence and absence. The "body" is fragmented into organs and consequently is only mentioned through the anatomical representation. Messenger uses secular relics to chart new geographies of the body. She shows the body as a fragment to

indicate that, although we inhabit the world in and through our bodies, we hardly know what the body looks like. Simultaneously she demonstrates that the body we are most familiar with is our own and yet it is a body we see and experience only in fragments, from the outside.

With *Penetration*, Annette Messenger has fragmented images in order to explore the concept of fiction, the dialogue between individual and collective identity, and the social issues of normalcy and moral. Taken as a whole the artist has challenged the traditional definitions of art and celebrated the creative processes that cross all boundaries. The basis of the work is, in all its forms, the investigation of the interface between visual manifestation, presumed identity, traumatic conception and the 'truthful knowledge' of what might be defined as - human - identity through the incorporation of anatomy and scientific representation, installation art and the viewer's participation, Christian ex-votos and Women's crafts, etc. In other words, the intention of the work is to subvert the visual/objective relationship between the object and the eye - between analysis and power - to create a relationship between participant and artwork that transgresses rules of ownership and objectivity and which begs questions of experience and being.

In conclusion, Messenger's *Penetration* aims for immediacy and a narrowing of the distance between objects and meanings - the distance between the physical matter and cultural signs. Via the sense of touch Annette Messenger has produced a body where the human experience is formed and transformed. In other words, *Penetration* appeals to the

most basic, lived sense of the body, questioning a physical sense of self and probing bodily definitions, limitations, boundaries and distractions.

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Plate 33 : Zodiac Man, Anonymous (Italian, Late Fifteenth Century), 1493. From Johannes de Ketham, *Fascilius Medicinae* (Venice : Cesarem Arrivabenum, 1522). Woodcut, 11 7/16 x 8 5/6" (29,1 x 21,1 cm) Purchased: SmithKline Beckman Corporation Fund, 49-97-3e. Electronic source : Princeton University website.

Plate 34 : Wound Manikin, Anonymous (German, Early Sixteenth Century), 1517. From Hans von Gersdorff, *Feldtbuch der Wundartzney...* (Strasbourg: Hans Shotten, 1540). Hand-colored woodcut, 10 5/16 x 7 3/16 (26,2 x 18,3 cm). Purchased: SmithKline Beckman Corporation Fund, 49-97-11m. Electronic source : The Wellcome Library for History and Understanding of Medicine.

Plate 35 : Annette Messenger, *The Cross* (La Croix), 1993. Sewn and stuffed fabric elements, string and wood. 200 x 80 cm. Illustrated in : *Annette Messenger, Faire Parade 1971-1995* (Paris Musées : Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1995), 207.

Plate 36 : Annette Messenger, *Nameles Ones* (Anonymes) 1993. Taxidermized animals with stuffed animal heads, and metal poles in clay bases, overall dimensions variable. Collection Contemporain du Musée Cantini, Marseille, France. Electronic source : MoMa.org, Annette Messenger Exhibition, 1995.

Plate 37: Annette Messenger, *Nameless Ones* (Anonymes) Detail, 1993. Stuffed animals, deads from soft toys, metal poles, lamps, mounds of earth. Overall dimensions 10 x 5 m. Musée Cantini Collection, Marseilles. Illustrated in: Catherine Grenier, *Annette Messenger* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 144.

Plate 38 : John Bell, Engraving of the bones, muscles, and joints, Illustration of the first volume of the *Anatomy of the Human Body*, London, 1804. National Library of Medicine. Electronic source: US National Library of Medicine, Exhibition Dream Anatomy.

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Plate 41 : Mona Hatoum, *Foreign Body*, 1994. Video installation with cylindrical wooden structure, video projector, amplifier, four speakers 350 x 300 x 300 cm. Collection: Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Photo: Philippe Migeat. Electronic source: iniva.org

Plate 42 : Mona Hatoum, *Foreign Body*, 1994. Video – Endoscopy. Electronic source: iniva.org

Plate 43 : Mona Hatoum, *Foreign Body*, 1994, video installation, 350 x 305 diameter. Electronic source: The White Cube Gallery.

Plate 44 : Man Ray, *Anatomies*, 1930. Electronic source: art-platform.com

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Plate 46 : Joseph Beuys, *Show Your Wound*, 1976. Detail of an environment consisting of 5 double objects. Dimensions: n.a. Electronic source: Network Writing Environment, University of Florida.

Plate 47 : Joseph Beuys, *Show Your Wounds*, Visual Arts Library, The Legacy Project. Electronic source: legacy-project.org © 2001 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Plate 48 : Annette Messenger's Studio, 1983. Illustrated in: *Annette Messenger, Comédie Tragédie 1971-1989* (Grenoble: Musée de Grenoble, 1991), 131.

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Plate 50 : Annette Messenger, *Chimaeras*, 1982-1984. Three acrylic and oil paint on gelatine-silver prints mounted on mesh, overall dimensions 96 ½ x 110 ¼ in. Electronic source : MoMa.org, Annette Messenger Exhibition, 1995.

Plate 51 : Damien Hirst, *Hymn*, 1996. Painted bronze; 240 x 108 x 48 in. The Saatchi Highlights. Electronic source: Guardian Unlimited © Guardian Newspapers Limited 2003.

Plate 52 : Damien Hirst, *Hymn*, 2000, Painted bronze 240 x 108 x 48 in. Gargosian Gallery New York. Electronic source: arnet.com

Plate 53 : Damien Hirst, *Hymn*, 1999. Painted bronze 240 x 108 x 48 in. Photo by Mary Barone. From "Out There," a show of works by gallery artists, inaugurating White Cube 2, London dealer Jay Jopling's new space on Hoxton Square, Apr. 14, 2000. Electronic source: <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/people/barone/barone4-25-00.asp>

Plate 54 : Bourgeois, *Eyes*, 1982. Marble; 74 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 54 x 45 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (189.9 x 137.2 x 116.2 cm) Anonymous Gift, 1986 (1986.397) © Louise Bourgeois/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Electronic source: metmuseum.org

Plate 55 : Kiki Smith, *Uro-Genital System – diptych* (male and female), 1986. Bronze with green patina. Electronic source: Studentbmj.com. The International Medical Students' Journal.

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Plate 57 : Christian Boltanski, *The Shadows* (Les Ombres), 1984. Silhouettes, copper sheet metal, metal bracket, candle, each part 31 x 4,2 x 31 cm. Collection FRAC Bourgogne. Electronic source: Art-to-date.com

Plate 58 : Mona Hatoum, *Light Sentence*, 1992. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Electronic source: De Appel Center for Contemporary Art, www.xs4all.nl/~deappel/monaE.html

Plate 59 : Mona Hatoum *Light Sentence*, 1992. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou. © Courtesy the artist and Jay Jopling/White Cube (London). Photo: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou. Electronic source: The Tate Gallery Website.

Plate 60 : Orlan, *The Reincarnation of Saint-Orlan*, Electronic source: Department of English, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Plate 61 : Orlan, *The Reincarnation of Saint-Orlan*, Photograph during operation, 1992. Electronic source: Tisch School of the Arts, New York University and Department of English, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Plate 62 : Damien Hirst, *The Void*, 2000. Installation view. Polished stainless-steel cabinet with mirror back, 16000 pills, glass locked doors, 15 x 17 feet. Electronic source: Online Gallery, dh.ryoshuu.com

Plate 63 : Damien Hirst, *The Void*, 2000. Detail. Polished stainless-steel cabinet with mirror back, 16000 pills, glass locked doors, 15 x 17 feet. Electronic source: Online Gallery, dh.ryoshuu.com

Plate 64 : Damien Hirst, *Love Lost*, 2000. Aquatic tank and filtration unit, 1 couch, 1 table, 1 stool, surgical instruments, 1 computer, ring, cup, watch and fish. Photography by Mike Parsons courtesy of Science Ltd. Electronic source: Crowds, Stanford Humanities Laboratory website.

Plate 65 : Damien Hirst, *Like Mother and Child, Divided*, 1993. Steel, GRP composites, glass, silicone sealants, cow, calf, formaldehyde solution; dimensions variable © the artist Photo: Tate Photography. Electronic source: Guardian Unlimited.

Plate 66 : Damien Hirst, *Adam and Eve (Banished from the Garden)*, 1999. Powder coated white steel and glass tank, steel gurney, saw, scalpel, bones and fat and formaldehyde (x 2). © the artist Photo: Mike Parsons Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube (London) and Science Ltd . Electronic source: Tate Gallery Online.

Plate 67 : Jana Sterbak, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, Detail, 1987. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1993. Electronic source: Walkerart.org.

Plate 68 : Jana Sterbak, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, 1987. Mannequin, flank steak, salt, thread, color photograph on paper mannequin 62-1/4 x 16-1/2 x 11-7/8” T.B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1993. Electronic source: hausderkunst.de.

Plate 69 : Annette Messenger, *Dependence – Independence* (Dépendance – Indépendance), 1995-1996, black and white photos under glass, light bulbs, string, yarn, fabric, netting, taxidermied animals, circa 2500 x 2500 feet, (250 x 250 m) installation at CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, 1996. Illustrated in : *Annette Messenger, Penetrations. A survey of recent sculptures and installations with a conversation between Annette Messenger and Jean-Louis Froment* (New York: Gargosian Gallery, 1997), 63.

Plate 70 : Annette Messenger, *Dependence – Independence* (Dépendance – Indépendance), 1995-1996, black and white photos under glass, light bulbs, string, yarn, fabric, netting, taxidermied animals, circa 2500 x 2500 feet, (250 x 250 m), installation at CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, 1996. Illustrated in : *Annette Messenger, Penetrations. A survey of recent sculptures and installations with a conversation between Annette Messenger and Jean-Louis Froment* (New York: Gargosian Gallery, 1997), 62.

Plate 71 : Annette Messenger, *Dependence – Independence* (Dépendance – Indépendance) 1995-1997, Mixed media, dimensions variable, Electronic source: artseensoho.com/Art/GAGOSIAN/messenger97/messenger5.html

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Plate 75 : Sanctuaire de San Alfio, Trescastagni, Sicily. Illustrated in : *Annette Messenger, Faire Parade 1971-1995* (Paris Musées : Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1995), 207.

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