

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved top and dark green shorts, is performing a handstand on a horizontal metal bar. She is upside down, with her legs tucked and arms extended upwards to grip the bar. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Clare would like to thank Jessie Scott, Kyle Weise, Simone Hine, and Stephen Palmer for their contributions and guidance towards this exhibition.

Clare Rae
VIDEOS

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VIDEOS

A conversation between Jessie Scott and Clare Rae, September 2012.

JS: So Clare, I'm a big fan of your photography, but my first encounter with your work was actually through video. So I'm really excited to see a whole show of your videos together in one place. I've heard your photography described as containing the quality of suspended narrative; implying something has gone before and something will come afterwards. There is something similar in the videos, but slightly different - you seem to use video to not just freeze time, but suspend it in stasis. Does working with video and temporality change the meaning of your photos?

CR: When I began working with video in art school it was always from a photographic perspective; I started off wanting to learn more about the language of cinematography. My photographic work then relied a lot more on narrative elements, so I was using video as a way to flesh this out. I started to experiment with stop motion, using photographic stills sequenced together. The first video I made this way was *Good Girl and the Other* (2007), and I loved the relationship that emerged between the still and moving image. This is still very central to the way I feel about my video practice; not that it supports or is adjunct to my photographic work, but that it can allow me to go beyond the still image to explore what happens next.

JS: So, if these images and videos are in some way interrupted or extended moments which are surrounded by implied narrative, who is the protagonist meant to be?

CR: Using myself in the work creates a slightly uneasy relationship between 'me' (as I see myself), and the person in the videos. To an extent I feel quite removed once my image has become mediated by the camera. So when I think of the protagonist in the work, she is me and she is not me. She is certainly not an 'every-woman' type of character, these works are borne of my own experience, but I hope that other people can relate to the figure in the works.

I think the core themes and ideas in the videos and photographs are similar though; the problems of representation and subjectivity, femininity and identity. However, the moving image adds a certain levity to the reading of the work, so in many of the videos there is a lightness that the photographs don't often convey. In many respects video can really open up and complicate expression in fantastic ways, don't you think? Temporality is a great term. I do feel as though the videos are referencing time in a similar way to the photographs - potentially through motion they can expand and stretch the way time occurs in the work.

JS: Interesting that you mention levity...in the videos there is levity of tone, but also of matter. You create these actions that have a different physical weight to what they would in real life: lighter, quicker, smoother. In *The Wait* (2009), you fly through the air around a pole in a sort of perpetual motion, long past the point where, in real life, gravity would bring you down. By contrast, the protagonist seems to convey great gravitas. What do you think this contrast says, especially in regards to "the problems of representation and subjectivity, femininity and identity"?

CR: Perhaps {the levity} started as a subconscious response to the weight I was feeling with the photographs. When I started using my own body in my work I was (and still am) keenly aware of the history of objectification of women's bodies in art, advertising and society more generally. I was looking for a way to engage with this problem in the work, which is largely what the series *Climbing the Walls and Other Actions* (2009) was a response to; I wanted to present the body in a way that described an embodied subjectivity, much like the way children relate to their physical environments. The videos began as a way to image the freedom I was seeking - what if I could liberate my body so much that it could defy gravity? Whilst this may sound a bit utopian and naive, it was a useful way to think about making the works.

In regards to the seriousness of expression, the actions that I perform in the works are often quite arduous in themselves, and require concentration! The day after swinging around that pole at the train station 100 times, my arms were like jelly. Perhaps the contrast or disjunct that happens is representative of the studiousness that occurs in art practice, which can be tempered by the sometimes surprising outcomes?

JS: I love the idea that even though you are aware of the problematics of the politics of representation, you are tackling representation and the female body head-on, and with photography, no less! How does this sit with the traditional strategy of performance-based feminist art, which used the supposedly "history-less" medium of video as a way to circumvent these issues?

CR: The politics of representation in feminist theory are many and varied, not least of which is the essentialist argument and backlash that occurred in the 1970s. Women artists using their bodies to explore feminine ideas or femininity were criticised for oversimplifying the issue, and reinforcing binary modes of gendered identification. I am aware of these debates, however I think the idea of embodiment, or an embodied subjectivity must start with the body.

My thinking around the problems of representation stems from the history of objectification of women's bodies. Understanding the way women have been portrayed and represented in cinema and on screens is fascinating and disturbing, and constantly reaffirms my feminist values and objectives.

There is such a strong connection between performance, photography and video as a means to describe physicality. In early feminist performance art photography was an invaluable tool, and the results are often the only record of the performance. I'm interested in the slippage between the performance and the documentation, questioning where the 'work' resides. It seems this was less of an issue with video art, as the document, the video, was more readily taken to be the work. For example Bruce Nauman's studio performances, and Hannah Wilkie's *Gestures* work from 1974, among many others. In this way these artists are returning the conversation to subjectivity, which is one of the most interesting aspects of video, I think.

This is an edited extract of an extended conversation. The full version is available to read at www.pictureskew.net