

**CLAIRE LAMBE
&
ATLANTA EKE**

27 MARCH – 4 JULY 2015

MISS UNIVERSAL

**GERTRUDE
CONTEMPORARY**

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I first met Claire Lambe when she arrived at my apartment in Sydney for a dinner party. She arrived after dinner, slightly intoxicated and bashfully confessed that she had just left Tacita Dean's *Event for a Stage* early; that is, after announcing mid performative silence that she 'needed to piss'. This irreverent, English-lad sensibility is evident in her work, at once sexual, violent and inert.

Atlanta Eke's approach to the body, albeit less lad-ish, has a similar matter-of-fact baseness — *Monster Body* (2012) being the most obvious example of her special brand of bodily grotesque.

At one point, Eke strikes a pose and urinates onstage before dropping to pose seductively in her own puddle. This disturbing moment [...] illustrates Eke's interest in addressing, questioning and rebelling against her own physical objectification.

Miss Universal continues a line of inquiry into the body from these two artists: Lambe from the perspective of the object, and Eke from an embodied live practice. This raises interesting questions about the modes of representation at play here, the hierarchy of materials, and treatment of time within the white cube context of Gertrude Contemporary.

The Object Body — 'The flow of bacteria'

'Perfect is boring', Lambe announces. At first glance, the bottoms on the 1.8 metre screen in *Miss Universal* might contradict this statement. But, on closer inspection, the disintegrating clay mounds that the women stand on betray the Busby Berkeley-style symmetry. The recreation of the infamous Crazy Horse image from 1976, the repetition of bodies seen from behind in a reverse chorus line has an air of

irreverence. It can be seen as a powerful statement to turn your back to the audience, to ignore them — particularly when, as in this case, the front of the body is never revealed. But these bodies are still condemned to become objects. Siegfried Kracauer, in his 1927 essay 'The Mass Ornament', notes: 'In the domain of body culture... American distraction factories are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics.'

Indeed, the buttocks in *Miss Universal* are all perfectly aligned through careful measuring of the height of the clay mound beneath them. The women maintain a human scale filling the 1.8 metre metal framed photographic print. But, as Kracauer laments, these kaleidoscopic images of 'plastic expressions of erotic life' are ultimately dehumanising, the girls can never be reconfigured back into individual human beings; they are lost within the monstrous abstraction of the collective universal body.

The Live and the Document — How to speak to objects without dancing around them

Conceived as a collision of two shows, Lambe's objects become debased body parts as Eke's body parts become objects. The live (Eke) and the object (Lambe) at times run parallel, smash into and penetrate each other. This project addresses the conversation being played out in contemporary art practice around the uncomfortable relationship between the static object and the live body within the white cube. This is an anxiety about how to resolve two very different treatments of time. Time for a dancer is unlike the time of an object; for one, you don't have to pay objects for their time, rendering people more expensive than objects.

Eke will arrive after the object, not responding to it necessarily but 'speaking around' it. She will operate in a different time paradigm, often leaving the object before closing time, in what she describes as an 'exhibition of rehearsal'. This flips the de Saussurean timeline of the original live moment and the subsequent document. Instead there is a time loop from the 'original' captured image in the 1976 photo shoot at the Crazy Horse theatre, to the pages of a men's magazine, to the recreation by Lambe on a large scale, and then back to the presence of Eke's live body. This loop messes with the often undisturbed and accepted hierarchy of *parole/langue*, speech/written or live/document, contributing an irreverent 'fuck you' to the often invisible power dynamic between materials at play in the white cube.

Jess Olivieri

Jess Olivieri is an artist, co-founder of the Parachutes for Ladies framework, curator of performance and writer, currently undertaking her PhD at Sydney College of the Arts.









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Gertrude Contemporary
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Image captions

Choreographer: Atlanta Eke
Dancers: Atlanta Eke, Annabelle Balharry, Chloe Chignell, Angela Goh, Tessa Broadby, Nick Walters, and Lilian Steiner
Photo: Claire Lambe

Claire Lambe with Phebe Schmidt
Untitled, 2015
digital print, welded mild steel frame
2 x 5m
courtesy the artists and Sarah Scout Presents,
Melbourne
Photo: Christo Crocker

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Atlanta Eke
Installation view, *Miss Universal*, 2015
Photo: Christo Crocker

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