

Yes! Yes! Yes!

Sex and visual culture are long-running bedfellows—we're so used to the influence of sex on our surroundings that we often see it in strange places (are the rows and rows of phallic creations in our cities' skylines actually a line-up of architects' gargantuan erections, or are they merely well-designed to minimize ground space and maximize capacity?). Sometimes the lines aren't so blurred. What of the art that wears its sexiness on its sleeve, diving head first into the most natural yet oftentimes confounding of all

human acts? We speak with six young artists who explore what sex and sexuality means today, from the most niche of fetishes in the online world to the women who are reclaiming pleasure for themselves IRL. What does sex look like in 2018? Why does it continue to fascinate artists? And what exactly is a cyber-erotic blob?

Words: Rosalind Duguid, Charlotte Jansen and Emily Steer



Nevine Mahmoud *JUICY FRUIT & HARD STONE*



“For me, a finger or a crack could also be erotic. And that could be any gender. It’s about touching, and hidden places.” Suggestion and seduction are key to Nevine Mahmoud’s sculptures—cold, stony forms that draw the mind to the warmest parts of the human body.

How does eroticism feed into your practice? The sculptures are rooted not just in eroticism as a theme or feeling but specifically in sculpture. There are a lot of female surrealists who I am very interested in, and then their male counterparts, like the Duchamp erotic objects, which were something I grew up with and was always very intrigued by. They’re erotic objects, weird body parts—today that might be sex toys. I thought it would be interesting with stone because the process of making it is so labour-intensive and there is so much touching in the finishing of them, it involves repeated touching and sanding and stroking.

There is a real mix of hard and soft. As the viewer you want to touch the works but there is a discomfort built in—it even feels as though you could bite into the peach sculptures, which would of course be very painful. I think there’s that translation of hard to soft which speaks very directly to process and your body wanting to interact with it; innately being in play. You don’t even have to say anything if that translation is already visible. I mean, that’s why I like sculpture. It evokes feeling instead of clear thought.

Do you feel there is a repelling element as well? I hope that’s there. For me, in terms of body parts, anything that’s fragmented or dismembered is innately uncanny or strange. They are pretty but I hope they also operate on a level of wondering what world they belong to, or imagining if a person was that big or that small.

Do you feel there is an element of cleaning up in your work? That’s something that

happens quite a lot with eroticism. Many of the less appealing aspects are taken away, like hair, moisture and veins. I think that’s true. Maybe that’s part of the hyper-seduction or something. I think the challenge is trying to get things a little bit more direct but also keeping some of that cleanness, which is denial of certain textures or elements of that environment, which creates more seduction. You’re not giving the whole picture.

Do you feel there are some objects that are innately erotic or do you think it is completely our cultural understanding or filter that makes them so? I think what we generally define as erotic are a lot of female bodies and particular erogenous zones. A crack or a crevice can be so many parts of a body as well. The peach is quite distinctly like a woman’s vagina, but there are also cracks where your skin folds over on your finger. For me, a finger or a crack could also be erotic. And that could be any gender. It’s about touching or hidden places. There are some forms in nature that to the human eye... I do believe there are realms of beauty or symmetry that are quite attractive.

I have always understood your objects to be gendered. There are obvious things like the peach, but then there’s the tongue that could belong to anyone yet I still see it as female. Do you think this is fair, or is it purely because we’re used to seeing the female body presented in a more erotic way? It’s not something I say out loud or write down, but it is feminine. But I don’t always think about them as gendered. The tongue is interesting. When I showed a friend of mine my booth at the Armory,

she saw the tongue as a guy and the female objects were on the floor: there’s this funny clown man on the wall, which I liked. He’s just on the wall, exposed, not really knowing what he’s doing.

There are a number of artists who have looked at disembodied female body parts—Sarah Lucas is an example of one who does so very politically. There is also a negative discussion around the disembodied forms in porn. Your work feels more celebratory. I think it’s operating in a realm that’s performative. You want art to be engaging, but when it’s celebratory it’s almost a performance between the work and the viewer; it’s making you feel. I hope that they do that.

You’ve mentioned that you don’t want to pick stone that looks too traditional. Nonetheless, do you want there to be a dialogue between your works and much more traditional stone depictions of the body? Stone has that inherent “this is art”. The material is so loaded that working with reduced or pop forms brings it back into... not design, I hate that word, but not antiquity. I do want there to be a middle ground.

You do get lots of luxury materials in sex toy design too. I was obsessed with the rose quartz dildo with the mink tail on the end in Coco de Mer [a sex boutique] in London. There’s definitely that luxury element to some of those alabaster and quartz textures. But the more I work with the stone, I’m contrasting more with metal or resin. I hope it will become more fluid. (ES)



Opening pages
Nevine Mahmoud
Slick Slice, 2017
Calcite and glass
12.7 x 24.1 x 6.3 cm

Previous pages
Mother Milk, 2017
Turkish marble, pigmented resin
30.5 x 40.6 x 25.4 cm

This page
Blue Donut, 2017
Blue marble, plexiglass
Marble: 40.6 x 40.6 x 22.9 cm,
pedestal: 81.3 x 45.7 x 45.7 cm

Peach Ball, 2017
Persian onyx, glass
25.4 x 25.4 x 25.4 cm

Opposite, below
Lick, 2017
Persian onyx, stainless steel
and steel hardware
12.7 x 26.7 x 16.5 cm



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