

Flesh Arranges Itself Differently

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**THE HUNTERIAN ART GALLERY
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In Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a menstruating Offred frustratedly laments "Now flesh arranges itself differently" to acknowledge her inability to ovulate.¹ The Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow has borrowed this poignant line for its eponymous (and decidedly less dramatic) exhibition on the human form devised together with the David and Indré Roberts Collection in London. The exhibition charts the history of the body through approximately forty-two artworks and medical artifacts, ranging from the Enlightenment to the present day. Yet nothing suggests the presence of stale and musty specimen jars. Rather, the contemporary art exhibition considers three key moments in cultural history: the anatomical turn of the 18th and 19th centuries; the technological turn after 1945; and the spiritual turn in the early 21st century.

Like *Flesh Arranges Itself Differently*, the Hunterian Art Gallery interweaves art and anatomy: its founder, the visionary British anatomist Dr. William Hunter (1718–1783), established obstetrics as a medical science. He was also the first academic to discover and appreciate fully the anatomical drawings by Leonardo da Vinci in King George III's library.²

Flesh Arranges Itself Differently opens with art-historical representations of the human form. Early anatomical prints and drawings by William Hogarth, William Cowper and Robert Macaulay Stevenson show lean muscular male bodies. They are placed in dialogue with four of Miriam Cahn's painted spectral bodies, emanating from four warmly toned canvases like reawakened X-radiographs with visible female genitalia. Cahn's figures hold the visitor's gaze; their agency remedies how women have been depicted in art history—transforming from passive, decorative props (such as the many reclining nudes) into domineering and lively subjects.

The following grouping thematizes the technological progress after 1945. This includes four of Eduardo Paolozzi's collages, which fuse photographs of sutured human figures with images of robots, rocket technology and other forms of nuclear radiation, evoking the eccentrics and optimism of the 1960s. Christine Borland's adjacent video animation *SimWoman* (2010) paints a more pessimistic picture: it shows the disquietingly thumping torso of an otherwise comatose medical mannequin. Also known as "Surgical Sams," these hyper-real mannequins continue to perpetuate the colonial, binary and ableist representations of adult bodies, suggesting that neither medical or technological progress equal universal rights nor remedy regressive narratives or stereotypes. Borland has cast her own female body as the mannequin to counter this lack of diversity. Similarly, Michael E. Smith's reassembled (and untitled) sculpture on the opposite wall, featuring a delicate plastic sheet being held together by a bone-like Rhododendron branch, mirrors this sentiment. Installed next to two X-radiographs of a broken clavicle and a fractured femur, it implies that the ostensible medical and technological progress has undermined nature and facilitated its decline.

Such decline, in turn, facilitates the occurrence of illness, and, indeed, to the left and right of this grouping are Yayoi Kusama's *Dots Obsession (Tobas)* (2016) and Horst Ademeit's *Observationsbilder (Observation photos)* (1991–2004). Throughout their careers, both artists have externalized their mental states, expressing their neuroses and obsessions in their art. Kusama has fashioned careful and delicate patterns of polka dots in all sizes, which occasionally burst the edges of the canvas to take over entire rooms or other sculptural objects. Ademeit, on the other hand, believed himself to be a victim of a conspiracy. For the last two decades of his life, he captured more than 6,000 instances of so-called cold rays on camera. In the exhibition, thirty of these polaroid photographs are shown. Devoid of human traces, they feature furniture and other interiors, lost bikes, empty landscapes and newspaper cut-outs. The overarching sound of a loud mechanical clicking from Liliane Lijn's *Cosmic Flares III* (1966), installed on the wall behind the *Observationsbilder*, heightens Ademeit's almost obsessive fear. Fascinated by dream states and the unity between body and idea, flesh and spirit, Lijn has created a square frame installation in which alternating flashing light bulbs and lenses evoke solid and liquid states of light in motion.