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BODY'S IN TROUBLE: A SHORT REFLECTION ON JEN AITKEN'S *LECHERY & LONGING*

According to art critic David Joselit, the two most obvious symbols of our body's transformation in the late twentieth century are the Internet and the Human Genome Project. He believes that if the Internet can represent the expansion of human mind, the Human Genome Project, by defining the organic life as a code, redefines the body as a modular machine that may be engineered and re-engineered. But the problem, according to him, lies not in the lack of new discourses around the history of science and literary criticism, but the absence of what he calls 'new forms of visibility'.¹

Historically, visibility has been used in relation to the strictly formalist tendencies of modernist art criticism that takes art as a self-contained category and sidesteps the cultural, philosophical, political, technological, psychic and corporal mechanisms of seeing. Much of the work in visibility theory has centered on historicizing vision in order to demonstrate the social construction of vision in oppose to simple and singular Cartesian perspective that weights so heavy on classic modernism.²

Jen Aitken's new series of sculptures titled *Lechery & longing*, in the same tradition as that of surrealist and dada artists, upset the process through which we visualize our world, and more importantly, see our bodies. By attempting to be a fashion solution for an otherwise technological and biological problem, Jen's work points to the contradictions inherent in the act of seeing and the role of visibility in predicting a future for the human body.

The *Duds* series are a set of sculptures made by the reconfiguration of the pieces of fabric used in the construction of five clothing items: a woman's dress, a pair of overalls, a man's shirt, a woman's winter jacket and a unisex hoodie. The positioning of these body forms by themselves and within the larger installation demonstrate the emptiness that stands in for the lack of deformed and imaginary bodies that may one day occupy the art, and transform them back into the functional pieces they may have been intended to be.

The *Lecherous* series are a set of sculptures made from various textiles, sand and plaster that distort and suggest new forms for human body, unifying the forms and their surface in a disturbing geometry. These covered organic forms speak about the post millennium anxieties regarding the convergence of biology and technology and the rapid developments in the fields of robotics, artificial intelligence, genetics and human cloning.

Jen Aitken was born in Edmonton and grew up in Toronto. She attended Ryerson University in Toronto for Fashion Design, and is now in her third year in the Visual Art Program at Emily Carr University in Vancouver. She recently curated a group show at Emily Carr's Concourse Gallery titled *Undress* (Jan 15 - 16 2009), and is currently working on a project for the Helen Pitt Back Gallery to be shown this spring of 2009.

1. David Joselit, biocollage, Art Journal, fall 2000

2. Hal Foster, Vision and Visibility, 1998, The New Press, New York,