

If the condition of a person's skin can be an indication of what is going on underneath, what we have here is a mirror of womanly health, devoid of _____ bumps and foul nature,

a _____ MACHINE!

When she arrived _____ she was yet another deflowerable country girl who had come to the right place to cash in on her "purity" for as long as it could last.

She confesses to _____ a more than average amount of that fabled _____ appeal because, among other reasons, she _____ has no problem, at least appearing like she's firing off _____ body shuddering climaxes.

Here again I feel pressure to put a _____ sexual encounter into words. I'm not going to waste that much time on it because to describe each penetration is an exhausting and even embarrassing exercise. a _____ way

of upping the porn dose in the guise of an art statement, so as to provide the viewer with twice as much _____ as would normally be available. It's

_____ over _____ now and _____ has _____ faded.

She's still half naked with her hair pulled back and

appears to have gone through her distinctive orgasmic protocol more than once, but _____ of course _____ she's lying

_____ you have to _____ either TRUST YOUR _____ GIRL, _____ or rely on _____ extremely acute extra-sensory perception.

This will be news we can all use to _____ comprehend the truest heart of _____ lust, _____

successfully achieved without dilution

Lora Hristova interviewed by Ellen Mara De Wachter on 12 February 2013

in the adult film industry. The text masquerades as something celebratory but the compliments are usually intercut with something quite insulting or offensive.

Alongside these is a self-portrait called *Money Shot*, in which I am pulling my head up by my hair with my tongue out. It references the pose at the climax of most pornographic films, in which the woman's face is presented to be ejaculated on. I like the theory that it's a visual representation of the invisible female orgasm, or rather a substitute for it, which offers undeniable evidence of enjoyment. I think the question of authenticity hovers over all of these works.

Instead of responding to the particular space I was more conscious of the time in which I was asked to exhibit. With International Women's Day falling in the middle of the exhibition on the 8th March, I was very aware of the opportunity to direct the conversation to particular experiences or aspects of womanhood I was most fascinated by. The main areas I wanted to explore were issues which have always dominated my practice: the creation of female identity and the workings of human sexuality. While in the past I have been interested in female sexuality, I've realised that when you're talking about porn, you're still really talking about male sexuality, and the projection of male desires and fantasies, which women then re-enact, absorb and alter. Within that are ideas about self-objectification and agency, which the self-portrait deals with more directly. In the *Tales*, sex is a commodity and a performance, with woman as 'machines' or 'receptacles.' It's the first time I've explored the actual porn industry in my work and I've been left questioning the degrees of autonomy and exploitation that women experience in that sphere.

EMDW: Why have you chosen a text-based approach to the subject of pornography, which

nowadays is predominantly image-based?

LH: When using images of women there can be a fear that you are perpetuating the objectification of the female body when you are actually trying to critique it so using text can be a way to avoid that. I wanted to distance the work from the instant gratification that pornography, especially visual pornography, offers. Text doesn't allow instant consumption. Being the traditional medium of analysis, it requires a longer period of time to be understood compared to an image which can be glanced at. When you enter a room and see text on a wall it feels quite safe and approachable whereas explicit imagery can scare people away, cutting short their engagement with the work. I suppose it is a little misleading but deception is another important concept in this show.

We have access to and are so bombarded by sexualised images from pop culture alone that we have all built up a massive back catalogue of visual material in our minds. If people wanted to illustrate these stories in their heads, they would definitely have enough imagery to be getting on with! I haven't shied away from using pornographic imagery in the past, and this isn't the end of it either, but for this particular piece it didn't seem appropriate. There were photographs alongside the articles, but I preferred to keep the identities of these women generic rather than specific to stop them becoming documentary and keep the possibility of them becoming archetypes open.

EMDW: Can you talk about your interest in pornography and why you are using contemporary art to address it?

LH: Pornography is the most visible and easily accessible representation of human sexuality available to us today and it quickly became my main source of inspiration when creating work which explored

issues around sex. Its influence stretches past individual sexual identities to contemporary culture and society as a whole. Rightly or wrongly it also has a massive role as educator. The pornification of mainstream media, the sexualisation of young girls and the commodification of sex are among my concerns. Porn presents such an unusual view of the world which is at odds with the politically correct/equal opportunities/health and safety ethics of western society and I'm interested in the reasons behind this fantasy land as well as the consequences of creating it. Pornography is an emotive subject and there are really extreme reactions to it and experiences of it. Whether people are disgusted, damaged, aroused, empowered or bored by it I find the range of responses fascinating. I think art provides a space for contemplation and a platform for discussion which allows for complexities, grey areas and generally a more nuanced approach to the subject where other disciplines may discuss things in a more polarised or sensational way. There is a way in which art is harder to pin down and allows more space for individual interpretation.

EMDW: Research is an important part of your practice and you have a website dedicated to your findings about feminism, the sex industry and pornography at oral-malkin.tumblr.com. Can you talk about the place of research and theory in your work?

LH: It's increasingly become the main part of my practice. I think the best artistic decisions I've made have been quite intuitive but that sudden inexplicable decision-making is always being fed by a reservoir of past experiences, reference points and knowledge. So the more information I can consume, the more informed and considered my choices are going to be, which hopefully leads to more complex and interesting work. I have a conceptual practice, rather than a craft-based one so I suppose reading is like my

version of drawing. It all springs from a desire for greater self-awareness, which started by reading feminist theory like *The Second Sex* or *The Beauty Myth* and identifying with parts of them and this has expanded into more generalised explorations of what it is to be a woman today and why people do the things they do. I have a great interest in psychology and psychoanalysis, in people's desires and motivations.

EMDW: How do you negotiate the dangers posed by making work that could be judged as simply being titillating? Is this an issue for you?

LH: I've never encountered anyone who has found my work pleasurable or arousing. Any sexual imagery or descriptions of sexual acts that could be titillating have usually been balanced with elements that disrupt enjoyment; things that disturb an easy or enjoyable consumption. I definitely think the overall experience of my work is uncomfortable and while discomfort can also be a source of sadistic pleasure I have never received that sort of feedback either. In *Tales of Hubris*, there's an awareness of the possibility of it being enjoyed sexually but I don't think it actually allows enough space for that.

It becomes slightly more problematic with the self-portrait because the young white woman is the most common type of female shown in visual media, from pornography to advertising, and we are conditioned to see her as defining society's most approved form of beauty and sexual availability. The waiting tongue is a passive gesture and could be seen as inviting but I think the facial expression is much more aggressive and confrontational than you would find in most porn which undermines any alluring aspects. I used the polo-neck jumper to create the subtle visual suggestion of a beheading.

EMDW: What were the particular challenges and

dilemmas you faced in making and subsequently deciding to show a self-portrait such as the one you've made for this show?

LH: I've never had a problem with using myself in my artwork and I wasn't fearful about putting my image next to these explicitly sexual works however it was a struggle deciding whether to show this self-portrait because as a female artist it is a very well-trodden path. You don't want to be accused of vanity or narcissism and there's a fear of simply repeating rather than commenting on the objectifying view of the female image or perpetuating unhelpful stereotypes.

In this case I felt it was important to show the self-portrait as a way to suggest a more personal reading of *Tales of Hubris*. I wanted to offer the opportunity of identification with the women in the stories, their psychological and emotional states. This opens up the conversation from the sex industry to the everyday experiences of any woman. It also highlights the role of choice and independence in the decision to engage in sexual activities or project a sexual persona – whether to a commercial end or not.

Maybe there is a levelling of the playing field by putting my own image out there. The idea of selling yourself is something we do in all sorts of careers, including in art. What does it mean to sell a self-portrait? That's a question in the title of the work: *Money Shot*. It could be seen as a pay-off, because you walk into a show about porn expecting to see images of women, bodies, naked people at least, and instead you are confronted with a load of text. This also feeds into ideas about female agency and autonomy. The work is not about victimhood or singling someone else out by using their image. Using my own picture becomes an almost symbolic gesture.



Ellen Mara De Wachter: Can you describe the works you've made for this project; how have you responded to the invitation to show in this space and what were the ideas you wanted to tackle with the exhibition?

Lora Hristova: The text pieces on show are from my new series *Tales of Hubris*. I originally thought of this series as a collection of parables but the three I've chosen to exhibit here function more like portraits. They consist of cut-up, censored and rearranged articles that I found in pornographic magazines, all by the writer Jeff Hubris. His chosen pseudonym is interesting; we know the meaning of hubris as 'pride before a fall', but the ancient Greek origin of the word refers to 'actions which shamed or humiliated the victim for the pleasure or gratification of the abuser' with the shame reflecting back onto the perpetrator. It's interesting to consider this in relation to the way Hubris describes these women and their careers

Artist's presentation
Lora Hristova
Thursday 7 March, 7pm

Zabludowicz Collection Invites is dedicated to presenting UK-based artists who do not currently have representation by a commercial gallery. Taking the form of solo presentations, exhibitions will result from an open-ended invitation to exhibit new work.

Reverse:
A Machine, 2013 from the series *Tales of Hubris*
Digital collage
Courtesy the artist

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