

IB Your work first came to prominence with a series of projects produced with analogue photo-booth machines.

You relinquished control by having a machine take the picture, even though you're positioning yourself in front of the lens...that must have been weird, to not be behind the shutter making that controlling, defining gesture. Why did you give it up to the machine?

LR It's like print making; you can set things up and then you let them roll, you don't know the result until you get the strip back or you pull your print. The element of chance, of surprise is what I love.

IB It's also striking that the strips of images from your subsequent photo booth projects are displayed in the form of a grid. I wondered if the grid and the indexicality of the process had some relationship to conceptual art? Were you influenced by that movement?

LR Yes. I'm drawn to artists like Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Agnes Martin. I've made some completely monochrome pieces using just colour, curtain and repetition, so not only making analogies with that minimal stance but also recording time, using systematic progression to produce portraits of time. People like Robert Morris and Smithson, are important too - their interventions and inventiveness.

IB Also, it's an external system which is dictated by the machine. I think it's quite structuralist, the way you sometimes had it photograph itself, for example when the booth is empty and it photographs its own curtains...it becomes self-reflexive. Another element is the process of indexing faces or gestures, which has its genesis with photographers like August Sander, of documenting a society in a certain era. Rather than having a very standardised way of presenting individuals however, you invited them to act out didn't you, so it was more performative? Likewise, your work then moved towards performance and self-portraiture - you started using your own body, your hands, physical gestures.

LR When I started to get typecast making the large collective pieces, I reacted by creating discreet works using hand signals as line and colour as form that mimicked examples of art historical genres. Re-doing works by Mondrian, for example, as post-modern spoofs.

IB What does the performative mean for you? There are also points when the work refers to theatre and literary drama, and a moment when it focuses on your presence, your body as subject and object?

LR Yes, I produced a whole slew of self-portraits, particularly a set wearing different disguises, adopting personae... I made an autoerotic piece and another self-portrait was a spoof of the Cerne Abbas giant (Collection ACE).

IB How much were they about investigating your sense of identity or your self, and how much were they about using the body simply as a formalist medium? They're not really about subjectivity are they?

LR Mainly I was concerned with the latter: the conceptual and the self. But I did make endless passport type records: a portrait a day.

IB Is there a connection with that great subject of self-portraiture – the nature of mortality?

LR Of course and I made a whole body of work around death, the memento mori aspect of the self-portrait also using a human skull and other traditional signifiers.

IB I was thinking about artists like Francesca Woodman and Cindy Sherman in relation to your work. Woodman makes her body merge with the environment, in a fantastical Alice in Wonderland way; her self-portraits are really about escape. Sherman interrogates the representation of women through art history, cinema, pornography and so on. What inspired you to use your own body?

LR I was interested in masquerade, how the self is presented, constructed. How important self-image remains. How you dress and through this, how people perceive and interpret who you are, how clothes tell the story. This academic interest shifted to the back of the booth and I started focusing on drapery rather than the figure. The drapery is so much more ambiguous, amorphous like painting, so it's via the self-portrait that I arrived at abstraction within the booth: all cloth no portrait. A Van Dyck show in 1984 had impressed me. He's an ace at painting drapery, it's liquid, diaphanous, marvellous, sexy - and it moves. In the photo-booth the lights and flash are so strong that you can only suggest moving cloth – you can rarely make a photographic blurr - but by butting photo-strips together in a collage you can suggest and create kinetic parallels.

IB You give control to the machine, there is no negative... Another element which I find really interesting is in connection with the curtain is drama and the theatre. You made the machine into a stage set and really played with that curtain. Rather than being a blanking or background device, it generates a sense of anticipation and excitement. Can you say more about that?

LR I started thinking about the functions of the curtain. When the Turkish diplomat, Khalil Bey commissioned Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*, he kept it hidden behind an actual green curtain. I saw it in Paris recently displayed like that; there's the trepidation and anticipation of opening up the secret - but it also reflects seductions, hierarchies, permissions and permissiveness. Mythical qualities can be evoked by the simple curtain. And the booth has a curtain at the back and also one that blocks out the light creating a type of private mini theatre.

IB The 'audience' then is the lens. That surrender to the machine, being the performer and being on its stage, is really quite a radical step...

LR Yes, like using the machine instead of having a paintbrush and colours, machine as limited palette... it doesn't control everything because all it can do is record. It can

only record what you show it, but the restrictions are a challenge and together with the element of chance, exhilarating.

IB So you displace yourself. You also reach out to very fundamental, ritualistic elements in culture - the pageant, the masque, the marking of seasons. These are fundamental metaphors and organising systems which filter through into culture. Another unexpected quality of the work is its relation to other disciplines, for example literature. There are musical notations running through the work.

LR I was very interested in ideas of authorship in the work of the British composer Henry Purcell who marks the transition from early masques to the beginnings of opera and to the actual script he had written...“sweet Thames run softly”...in the back of my head there was Kandinsky, the spiritual in art, the idea of the music of the spheres, mythical nature – Blake and Emily Dickinson.

IB You also find these beautiful analogies between say sign language, signing, choreography – and drawing, calligraphy and music. They all interrelate. You used the gestural rhythmic patterns in the flower study series. Why were you drawn to a genre which can be seen as quite decorative or kitsch?

LR Once when I went down to Bookham to the photo booth factory in Surrey, I found some pussywillow and it was just gorgeous, and that kicked off a whole series of work. I had some wonderful dark blue silk and it made me think about willow patterns... I was also making a film in my garden of flowers, a bit like Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century flower paintings. That work exploited different pattern rhythms. These were enhanced by the sharp automatic lighting conditions of the booth - I never tampered with this – I then exploited the fantastic rhythms and trompe l’oeil kinetic effects as different graphic elements in collage.

IB So, they become quite abstract, painterly and formalist. They also relate to a history of using floral motifs as a decorative surface. I’m thinking of Ingres for example, or later Matisse. And within architecture and interiors as well, decorative techniques drawing on nature... They also evoke the *vanitas* tradition in still life, intimations of mortality.

LR The marriage of the indexical and grid like with the expressive and delicate...intertwined gives it an unexpected and beautiful quality.

IB You make a feature of exquisite studies of fabric where again, repetition creates a disjunction between the detail and what happens when it’s multiplied to create a surface. You’ve talked about this movement in another way, that is between public and private; and between representation and abstraction. How did you structure these and why is it that we know this is fabric? What stops you from just making it pure colour? yet retaining its material quality, it is both abstract yet located in the real.

LR I started to look into the different characteristics of fabric. Sharp, starchy and crisp or flexible, soft and muted. We perceive the differences with our eyes, it’s automatic; but, presented serially the different perceptions can be analysed. I also wanted to make connections with moving water, this idea of tumbling cascades and fountains.

By the juxtaposition of different cloths and colours, and the formal aspect of collage, they recreate the sensation and emotion of looking at water in action.

IB So, the tactility, the sense of weight and texture becomes a sculptural experience which is purely visual – that also triggers associations.

LR Yet it remains a construct. When you look at those collages you can see that there are strips that are stuck together. It's very banal, and I like that, the transparency of what it is. It's real and it's fake.

IB They're also sensual, even erotic. I think there's a sexual quality which runs throughout all the work. How consciously are you trying to explore that?

LR I don't know how conscious it is but I know it's there. The piece that was installed on the facade of the BBC building (*Kerfuffle* 2004), I was amazed that people didn't really voice that - and yet it was like an enormous boudoir. I think that harks back to the aspect of revealing and concealing, and peeping behind the curtain, all of that intrigue. The voyeuristic element.

IB There is a division in your practice between work that pursues your own inner investigations and projects created by invitation, that are site specific, commissioned to inaugurate a theatre or a new building. How do you step out of one essentially private mode into a public one?

LR The great advantage of commissions is that you can make large, permanent artworks. I am still interested in this idea of 'public participation' - but in a new way, so that, for instance, people go into a building and confront an etched mirror and become part of the work, à la Pistoletto! So, I enjoy one, but I couldn't lose the other because it's the other working method that informs everything. My wish is to make both function in tandem and complicity.

IB I think that commissioning agencies are getting more intelligent and that audiences everywhere are more sophisticated. What's been your most successful public commission?

LR Although the BBC *Kerfuffle* piece was memorable - you could see it from a plane! The two-part work at Birmingham Hippodrome exists as a continuing dialogue between the outer glass etched walls of the building and the inner hanging sculpture.

IB With this shift in technology, how are you moving forward in your own ideas and work?

LR I have been taking the veil for a spin through Borromini's architecture. Using the digital to capture coloured fabric swirling in tune to the Baroque, played as music in tempo to the solid toned curve. Soundlessly floating febrile forms into our consciousness...suggesting memories faint and concrete, embedded within the nostalgia that is the photograph.

IB This reiterates a sense of an external structure, a framework that enables you to push the formal and conceptual limits. You also continue to range across time in

terms of references, from C17th architecture through opera, poetry to something very much about the here and now, participation, the crowd - it's amazing, the fluidity you've achieved over twenty years.

IB It's striking that in a way your work isn't about indexing now. It does seem more embedded in literary and iconographic histories.

LR Yes, I'm relating the energy of the work of authors like Cixous, Derrida, Bachelard, Sebald and Barthes.... Sympathetically and simultaneously acknowledging the historical significance of the buildings and bricks of the past, the poignant implications across time that celebrate the geometry of order, architecture and contemporary text.

IB It's as if you're trying to find mythical narrative structures within culture?

LR I think our whole culture is about making equivalences isn't it and reinterpretations in different guises, feelings about what it's like to be alive. I'm creating chaos in the form of fragments of vision, using jumping coloured cloth as subject – the interloper. Making this analogous to a beauty that questions the known order and accepted rule, augmenting it by suggesting fleeting figures, ghosts in unpopulated spaces.

IB You've also translated these photographic "equivalents" into other media?

LR Recently making photograms – unique with no negative, like the booth strips. In a sense reiterating the formal qualities of the booth collages – the imagery straddling the silks or papers that act as surface and behaves as the connecting grid structure. Again there are limitations because of the medium and it's quite strict because they are only in black and white.

IB Has feminism been an influence? Do you think there's anything to do with your gender in the way that you work?

LR Using photography might be partly to do with it. But I'm a collagist by nature and that's why the booth worked well. Also this method of picking distinct elements and collapsing them together to make a statement. Considering polarities, opposites. Questioning the idea of the impenetrable, hard substance and being challenged by its opposite: light matter, gossamer soft and floating. Asking if one subsumes the other? Does heavy mean difficult and thus more important, substantial? Can we assume that the former is representative of the conscious whilst the latter echoes the unconscious? Are they the warp and weft of high and low – concrete density versus transparent clarity, the animus and anima? Are these polarities and opposites, attracting and repelling? Or merely two sides of the same coin? If feminism is situated within the boundaries of this discussion then yes, I want to bring a cohesion and completion of this rhythmic circuit through the vision of cloth photographed in movement.

IB What's terrific about your practice is that it responds to the scenario and then pulls that right back into the work. Being an artist, curator, lecturer and an educator makes your work richer, it isn't like they are separate activities, each is folded seamlessly into the other.

