

Séance and the sewing circle

In *We will wait and see*, Alice Lang has again used her obsessive techniques of needlework and sewing to transform and mutate domestic materials from the ordinary and comfortable into the freakish. Second hand knitted jumpers and worn bed sheets are discerningly butchered with scissors to be reassembled and re-imagined into the compelling and grotesque forms we encounter. It takes little imagination to situate these forms as originating from, or within our own bodies, and yet each defies obvious recognition or classification.

These are forms that invite a cautious inspection and tactile interaction. We are tempted to touch these strange things as a result of our familiarity with the material, and yet might become hesitant or experience a sense of trepidation when responding to their inherent uncanniness. This tension is also apparent in Lang's pod-like sculptures that would seem to nurse humans inside soft caverns of fabric, yet there is the distinct impression that this nurturing could easily be a smothering or some type of parasitical asphyxiation instead.

Imagining what it would be like to be shrouded by one of these forms may well remind us of wearing a homemade Halloween costume, a low budget domestically sourced disguise crafted to frighten onlookers. Lang's version of the Halloween costume evokes the kind of imagery we might see in a B-grade horror film. Like the best of these B-grade films, Lang attempts to evoke a more frightening and freakish ambience by exploiting the paranormal and the supernatural.

In the photograph '*we will wait and see*', Lang assumes the role of the mystic and spiritual seeker. The artist sits seemingly host to one of her parasitical creations while having an 'aura' photograph taken. Lang's pose in the photograph is demonstrative of the position needed to photograph the 'aura' successfully, to properly capture the colours of the psyche, but it is also reminiscent of someone attempting some otherworldly experience like levitation, or cosmic flight.

The video work titled '*INFJ seeks ESP*' shows Lang being tested for telepathic powers using the Ganzfeld telepathy test. Regardless of how successful Lang may actually be at telepathic prediction, the theatrical, sham like qualities of the aesthetic make light of the implied claim to genuine prescience, also making difficult any real emotional or personal access to the work. The performance has all the smoke and mirrors that you might associate with the work of mediums, psychics or magicians. In this work Lang plays with our gullibility, the desire that many of us have to foresee the future, paying for sessions with tarot cards, palm readings, aura photographs, even phone and SMS clairvoyants. What were essentially parlour games have spread to Internet sites that show how to perform actions like Crystal gazing and séances, and all are readily accessible in our own homes, the seemingly incompatible combination of the technological and the spiritual realms ignored.

Anecdotally it appears as though it is mainly women who frequent clairvoyants and other 'spiritual advisors', often as individuals and most commonly through the pages of women's magazines. Despite this, historically women have pursued the spiritual in groups. Spiritualism, witchcraft and the witches Sabbath are just a few communities or practices led by a majority of women throughout western history, and although these practices have often been characterized as dangerous and heretical, they did enable women to have a community that was often creative in the practicing of it's 'crafts'.

In contemporary society many woman still seek out a community enabling them to express their creativity. However, what might be made through your typical craft and sewing circle is a far cry from Lang's creations. In this exhibition Alice Lang combines her 'crafts', the obsessive sewing circle, and flaky new-age ritual, enacting a self-critique of each other. It's as though Lang's sewing circle has meshed itself with the séance or witches Sabbath, and what are we presented with? The products of a sewing circle possessed?

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