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Front cover: Heather Cassils, *After*, 2014, 2,000-pound clay bash, remnant sculpture from the performance *Becoming an Image*, Buddies in Bad Times, Toronto, 2014; **back cover:** Heather Cassils, *Becoming an Image Performance Still No. 1*, Edgy Women Festival, Montreal 2013 (artworks © Heather Cassils; photographs by the artist and Alejandro Santiago). See p. 70.

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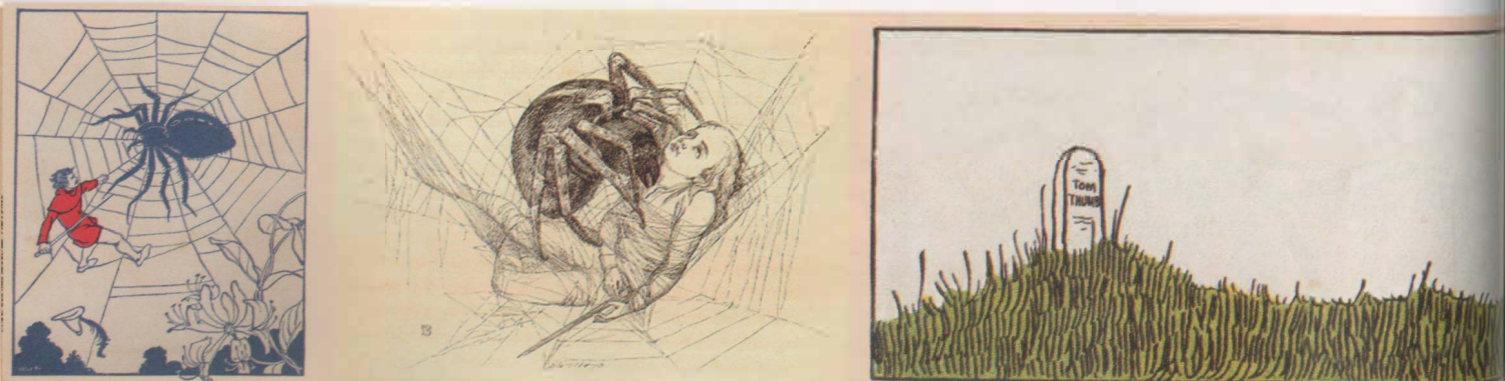
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much of Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex with extraordinary fidelity? A respect for our most ancient stories as representatives of psychic truths was part of psychoanalysis from its inception, even if Greek myths have been (perhaps pretentiously) favored over folk tales. Freud and the analysts who followed in his footsteps have often marshalled old stories to explicate the theories expounded in their work. Yet sometimes the connections between theory and story are oblique, to say the least. The relationship that the analyst sees may strike the reader as more a product of the analyst's interpretation and less something that is implicit in the story itself; something like this is true of the story of Oedipus, where most of Oedipus's exploits play no role in the explication of the complex. In contrast, the story of Tom Thumb tightly parallels Freud's schema. For me, its very existence serves as a rather unusual validation of Freud's insights, and perhaps a confirmation that he was tapping into something fundamental to who and what we are, something so much a part of us that we had already been telling ourselves the same story for countless generations.

Jeanne Dunning's photographic, sculptural, and video work explores our complicated and contradictory relationship with aspects of our physical existences, including the body, gender, mortality, and notions of normalcy. Her work has been shown extensively throughout the United States and Europe since the mid-1980s. Her 2002 web project for Dia Center for the Arts also involves the story of Tom Thumb: <<http://awp.diaart.org/dunning/>>. This essay was written in 2004 but never published and was revised for this publication.

The illustrations accompanying this text are taken from some of the innumerable books telling versions of Tom Thumb's story that have been published over the last four hundred years.



This forum, which originated as a panel at the 2013 Annual Conference of the College Art Association in New York, developed from the following question: how do sculptural practices uphold or, conversely, equivocate the certainties of gendered and sexual embodiment? Having first broached the issue in our own writings on such artists as Lynda Benglis and Rachel Lachowicz, it seemed relevant to us, in a moment in which issues pertaining to gay marriage, queer

suicide, intersexed athletes, and transgender pageant contestants—are increasingly dominating news headlines, to assess whether and how other artists and scholars might be responding. We sought out proposals that interrogated how sculpture, and the unwieldy relations it incites between bodies and objects, figured into these sexual politics.

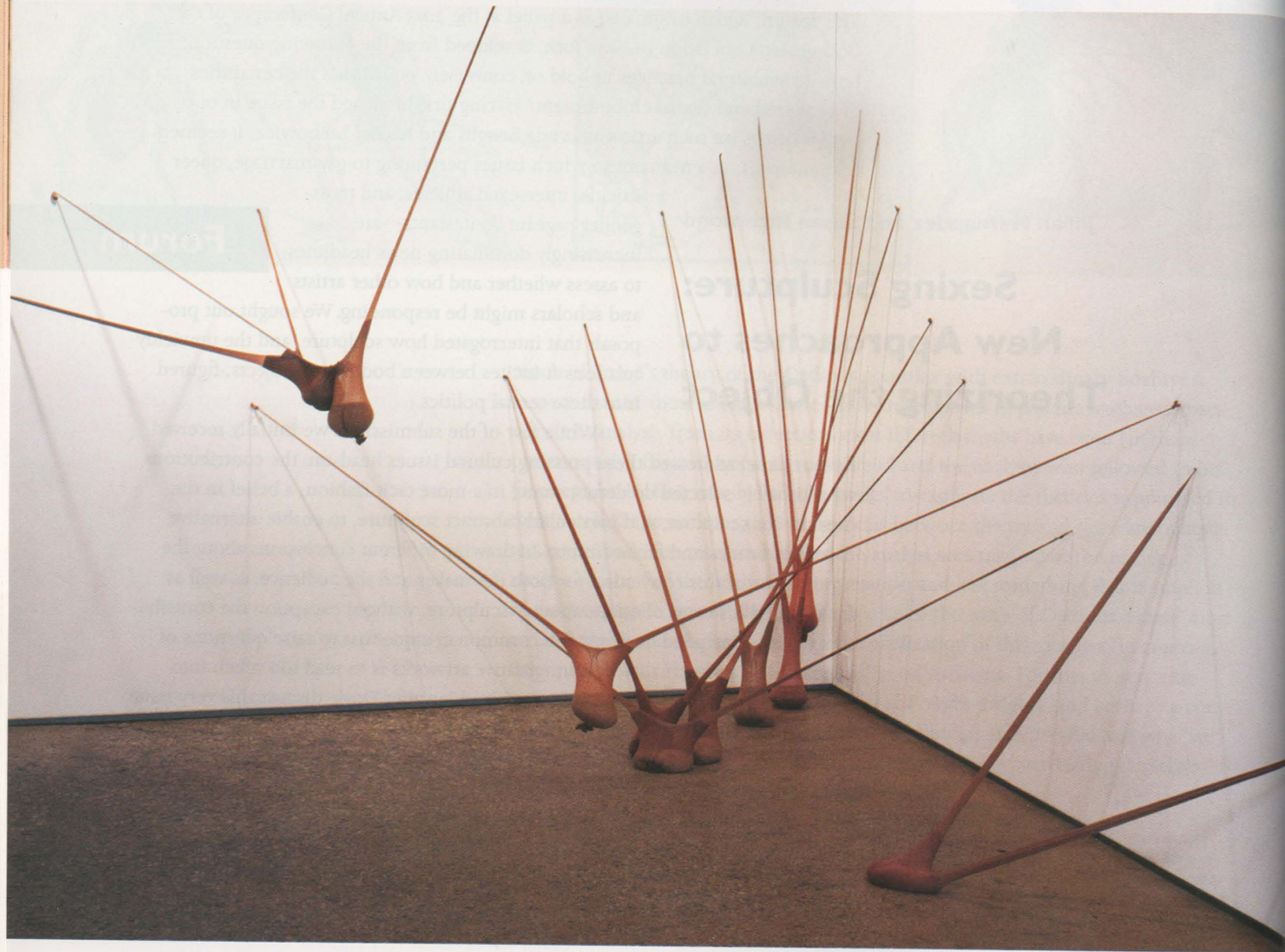
Forum

Jillian Hernandez and Susan Richmond

**Sexing Sculpture:
New Approaches to
Theorizing the Object**

While few of the submissions we initially received for our panel addressed these pressing cultural issues head-on, the contributions we ultimately selected do demonstrate, in a more tacit fashion, a belief in the capacity for sculpture, and particularly abstract sculpture, to enable alternative modes of erotics and embodiment. In drawing different conclusions about the significance of this conviction for both the maker and the audience, as well as for received histories of contemporary sculpture, without exception the contributors we have included here rebuff a common critique that to raise questions of gender, race, and sexuality in nonfigurative artworks is to read too much into them. In their conversation, David Getsy and Jennifer Doyle discuss this very issue at length. As Doyle tellingly remarks: "We do not encounter [art works] in isolation: we bring a history of sensation to them." She cites Senga Nengudi's biomorphic works in this context. In point of fact, the very title of Nengudi's series of sand- and rubber-filled pantyhose sculptures from the mid-1970s, *R.S.V.P.*, is a pointed request for viewers to respond to the work's corporeality. Nengudi's dark, pendulous forms invoke the physical resiliency of the human body as well as the increasing elasticity of gender, sexual, or racial labeling.

In similar fashion, a recent series by the artist Lily Cox-Richard, *The Stand (Possessing Powers)* confronts the idealized gender and racial tropes of nineteenth-century neoclassical art, notably as embodied in the sculptures of Hiram Powers. By focusing on the point of contact between the figures and the supporting elements in Powers's work, Cox-Richard generates ambiguously erotic abstract forms that invite but also resist bodily identification. Powers's allegorical figures epitomize ideologies of racial and gender difference in nineteenth-century US cultural discourse. Cox-Richard's perversely partial forms, by contrast, potentially activate the margins, and marginalized subjects, of that discourse. As such, the contemporary artist's engagement with the legacy of a once-celebrated American sculptor inspires larger questions of inheritance and tradition, as well as agency and citizenship, as these issues play out in the social spaces of sculptural representation. In their essay on Cox-Richard's work, Nicholas Hartigan and Joan Kee pay particular attention to how the artist deliberately deploys additions and omissions, presences and absences, in her complex engagement with Powers's originals. They theorize what this approach, with its nod to contemporary tactics of appropriation, contributes to assessing the critical capacities of sculpture today.



Senga Nengudi, R.S.V.P. 1, 1977/2003, nylon mesh and sand, 10 pieces, dimensions variable. Museum of Modern Art, New York (artwork © Senga Nengudi; photograph provided by Thomas Erben Gallery, New York)

For Gordon Hall and Rachel Middleman, the legacy of sculptural practices of the 1960s and 1970s continue to generate new and alternative readings, both contributors demonstrating how our familiarity with that era and its key figures is anything but exhausted. In her essay, Middleman proposes that Hannah Wilke's early phallic and labial sculptures, when reexamined in the context of a number of important New York exhibitions dedicated to erotic art in the 1960s, constitute a radical articulation of female sexuality and a provocative alternative to the imagery produced by male artists at the time. Notably, Middleman makes a case for rethinking the significance of Wilke's work as a proto-feminist expression of female heterosexuality, suggesting in particular that the artist's interest in producing male bodily surrogates challenges received histories of early feminist erotica as largely, even solely, concerned with female body imagery from a political rather than sexual perspective.

In shifting the dialogue to Minimalist works that appear to have few or tenuous relations to gendered embodiment at all, Gordon Hall's poetic and pedagogical

"Object Lessons" incites us to engage in dissident readings of sculpture that attend to their queer teachings: "Not primarily because of what we see in the sculpture, but because of how these sculptures might enable us to see more generally." The questions Hall raises about visibility are especially timely at a moment when queer publics are crafting nonnormative subjectivities and politics in the wake of the US Supreme Court's repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act. Centering on the work of the artists Richard Artschwager, Robert Morris, and Fred Sandback, Hall's essay demands more imaginative methods for assessing the gender and sexual possibilities augured by art objects.

Since the 1990s, Rachel Lachowicz's sculptural practice has troubled the seeming gender and sexual neutrality of Minimalist aesthetics. Producing abstract works from the hypermaterial and hypercorporeal substances of lipstick wax and eye makeup, Lachowicz marks art objects as contingently gendered. Her work undermines the widely held valences of Minimalist abstraction as universal, ungendered, and value-free by making them specific and giving them names, as in her landmark work *Sarah* (1993), which playfully references Richard Serra's *One Ton Prop* of 1969. Whereas Hall focuses on visibility, Lachowicz's more recent work prompts reassessments of notions of bodily interiority versus exteriority, subjectivity and objectification. In *Cell: Interlocking Construction* (2010), geometric plexiglass shapes are filled with varying shades of blue eyeshadow pigment. The makeup gives "form" to the sculpture, functioning not as surface or adornment, but as its core. Like the camp aesthetics discussed here by Doyle and Getsy, Lachowicz's sculptures refuse to use makeup "properly," and are not ashamed to be perceived as wearing "too much."

Rounding out this forum, Getsy and Doyle weigh in on the significance of queer formal practices and art-historical scholarship. Keeping their conclusions open-ended, the two nonetheless make compelling claims for the urgency of such projects. Their provocative observations recall a proposition voiced by David Halperin, now over a decade ago. In lamenting the normalization of queer theory within academic disciplines, Halperin concludes that the solution to this problem lies not in developing new theoretical formulations of queerness but, instead and "quite concretely, reinventing its capacity to startle, to surprise, to help us think what has not yet been thought."¹

Jillian Hernandez is assistant professor in the Ethnic Studies Department and Critical Gender Studies Program at the University of California, San Diego. Her essay "Makeup on the Face of the Father: Recent Work by Rachel Lachowicz," appears in *Rachel Lachowicz* (Marquand Books, 2013).

Susan Richmond is associate professor of art history in the School of Art and Design at Georgia State University, and author of *Lynda Benglis: Beyond Process* (I. B. Tauris Press, 2013).

1. David Halperin, "The Normalization of Queer Theory," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 (2003): 343.