

Kunstverein

April 22–June 3, 2023

Fetishism and a hint of S&M lurk just beneath the surfaces of Alexis Hunter's photographs... Her rage at capitalism is focused upon the mass media which have, as Judith Williamson puts it, been 'selling us ourselves' for profit.
—Lucy Lippard

The materials I am drawn towards are manufactured in global quantities and are of institutional utility. These materials are tried and tested when subjected to acts of control and duress, measure and fitness. Sometimes this process is witnessed and captured through a camera lens, resulting in documents that play on photography's power to empirically index untenable actions.
—Lou Hubbard

This exhibition begins with a plot twist: an emergency exit, sealed shut. In the first instance, a crisis. Fashioned as a safety measure, the emergency exit should be able to be relied upon, the last resort and a first port of call wrapped up in one. But when that falters, when the structure supposedly there for your protection fails you and there is no possibility of escape, what next?

Taunt the structure, said New Zealand artist Alexis Hunter (1948–2014), whose work spanning photography, painting and organising was a key contribution to the feminist art movement of Britain in the 1970s. Included here is a collection of her 'narrative photo sequences' made between 1974 and 1978, produced in Hunter's quintessentially serial fashion. The works forensically detail her manhandling of artifacts of patriarchal oppression. In each individual series,

she serves up the objects and their accompanying contexts on a photographic platter, storyboarding her fornication with mechanical instruments, bulging crotches and domesticity as a way to subvert the dominant narrative of the male gaze, instead writing her own path to independence and sexual expression.

Due to the overtly feminist nature of Hunter's work, it didn't get the exposure it deserved at its time of making. This is evidenced by an incident in 1978, when a group of male museum workers busy with unpacking her works in Belfast objected so strongly to their content that they were withdrawn from the exhibition. Nor did she receive the professionalism she demanded, a request insisted upon through how she arranged her practice, working four days a week on 'creative explosions' and managing everything else around them the other two, steadfastly intent on establishing herself and the work of other women artists, her advertising background put to use in full force. This is

present in her activist work with the Women's Workshop of the Artist's Union, for which she organised a slide night at the well-established Hayward Gallery, empowering women to show in an institution they otherwise wouldn't have access to, as well as her friendly (though unrelenting) lobbying of the Women Artists Slide Library to include anyone she saw fit (so long as they too subscribed to a certain level to professionalism).

Twenty-eight years later we meet Lou Hubbard (b. 1957), an Australian photographer and sculptor pushing at the integrity of structures through often eerie sculptural configurations and processes, sometimes recorded on film. She uses everyday, standardised domestic objects in her work—brushes, clothes, ornamental figurines—which she submits to odd, often-violent procedures, recombining them in unexpected ways. From surgically operating on marshmallow eyeballs with dexterous precision to working en masse with comically inflatable (and therefore defunct) walking frames, Hubbard's work is as much about the narrative absurdism of expectation and preconception as it

is about an almost mundane trialling and testing of the durability of materials.

While Hubbard and Hunter coincidentally have many things in common—long periods teaching countless students at art academies, a background in commercial photography and film, a keen sense of humour, a narrative impulse, an investigation into the body's relation to and with standardising structures and, though less overtly in the work of Hubbard, the formative context of Antipodean feminist thought—what sits central to this story is their shared enquiry into the submission of materials and structures when force is applied. For Hunter this was an unyielding reckoning with a stifling political order, for Hubbard this is a sculptural and linguistic exercise geared towards interrogating conditions of control. For both, in these narrative arcs and plot twists from the status quo, the material generated speaks for itself: resistance is waged in the fullest, sealed doors will be pushed open with force.

Kunstverein
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Wednesday–Saturday, 1–6pm

Kunstverein would like to thank the artists; Althea Greenan and the Women's Art Library at Goldsmiths University, London; Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne; Richard Saltoun Gallery, London; Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam; Arlo Mountford and Matthew Benjamin. We would also like to thank our members and Amsterdam Fonds voor de Kunst for their continued support.

Lou Hubbard & Alexis Hunter An Emergency & Exit Sealed Shut

List of Works

Ground Floor

Front to back (from entrance)

Lou Hubbard
Pokey Chanel
2010
rubber toy, Chanel packaging, 12 x 20 x 4 cm

Alexis Hunter
The Marxist's Wife (still does the housework)
1978/2005
20 colour laser copies on archival paper in 4 framed panels, each panel 109.5 x 36 cm

Lou Hubbard
Undercover
2020
athletic sports supporters, planet lamp stand, clothes horse rod, curtain rod hook, muselets, tabletop ironing board, upright ironing boards, acrylic sheet, inkjet print by Rebecca Hobbs (2004), Murano glass, wire basket, stress ball, octopus strap, 170 x 170 x 108 cm

Alexis Hunter, various archival materials, courtesy of the Women's Art Library, Goldsmiths University, London.

Lou Hubbard
I-Slice
2012–2021
egg slicer, mirrored sunglasses lens, sunglasses frame, 12 x 6 x 5 cm

Alexis Hunter
Approach to Fear V: Pain – Medication
1976
10 colour photographs, mounted on paper, 57.5 x 44.3 cm

Alexis Hunter
Approach to Fear II: Change Decisive Action
1976
18 colour photographs, mounted on board, 56 x 74.4 cm

Lou Hubbard
EYE OPS 1–5
2013
high-definition video with colour and sound, 8:00 min

Lou Hubbard
Core
2007
Huon pine, plastic giraffe, 10 x 4 x 5 cm

First Floor

Left to right (from stairs)

Lou Hubbard
Walkers with Dinosaurs
2023
inflatable walking frames, Dino-Chairs, dimensions variable

Alexis Hunter
Approach to Fear III: Taboo – Demystify
1976
30 colour photographs, mounted on board, 57 x 43cm

Lou Hubbard
Hack
2006
single-channel video, 6:39 min

Lou Hubbard
Drill
2008
single-channel video, 11:00 min

Lou Hubbard
Dog Dogged
2010
single-channel video, 7:00 min

Lou Hubbard
Brush-Bush
2016
tortoise shell brush, acrylic equestrian action figurine, 14 x 5 x 7 cm

Lou Hubbard
Sunday Best Chestnut
2017–2019/2023
glass-topped wooden table, bronze hook, raincoat, shoelace, empty tin of chestnut purée, plywood base, acrylic sheet, dimensions variable

Alexis Hunter
The Object Series
1974
gelatin silver print, 50 x 60 cm