



## [POP 823 Wednesday 8 February 2012](#)

Today's POP is Stephanie rethinking cyborgs and Fritz Lang's Maria...



If you have a free afternoon, you should definitely pop over to the ROLLO gallery for a small but loaded exhibition, *The Body in Women's Art Now*. In the third installment of her three-part series, curator Philippa Found explores the current and future state of the female body within the realm of contemporary technology.

The space is currently hosting work by four very postmodern feminists including recent Slade grad [Helen Carmel Benigson](#), aka. Princess Belsize Dollar. A performance artist, Benigson uses an alter-ego to explore and push the boundaries of social media and gender performativity.

I had a chat with both Benigson and Found to ask them some questions about their work, the exhibition, and the current position of the female body in a technological world.

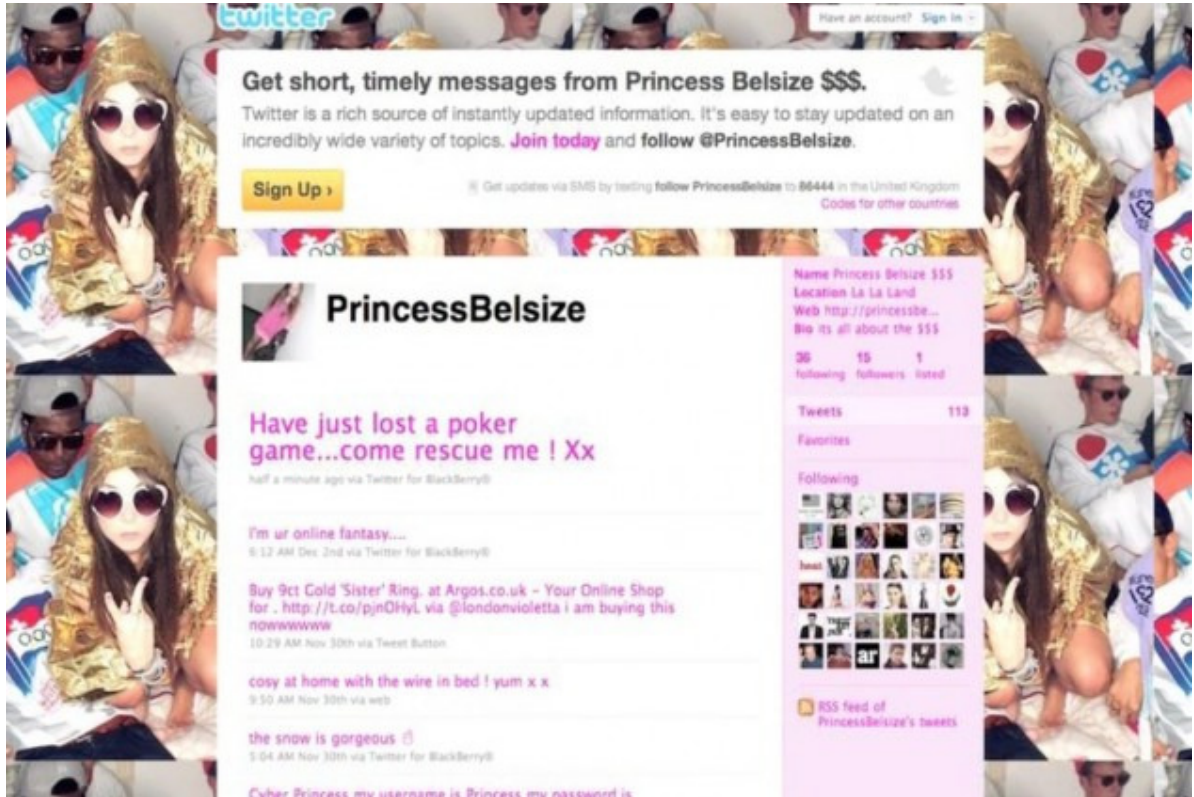
### HELEN CARMEL BENIGSON (PRINCESS BELSIZE DOLLAR)

**Tell me about your alter ego; where does Princess Belsize Dollar come from?**

Princess Belsize Dollar was created in LA. She is a rapper and sushi addict! She stands for a feminine, super-sexy activist who performs as a version of myself as well as a completely severe alternative. Princess Belsize Dollar is a constructed identity, designed to conceal at the same time as reveal through performance. Her ideal collaboration would be with Eminem.

**Do you think we are empowered or restricted by our Internet avatars? Are you empowered or restricted by your various avatars?**

It's empowering at the same time as endangering. I think avatars become signs and symbols for things, which can be problematic if they stop stimulating image and performance in real life. I am interested in how the corporeal is thought about in relation to the screen and furthermore, thinking about the screen as a space itself.



*Helen Carmel Benigson- Tweeting Even Though No-one Is Listening, 2011, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art*

Are we becoming, or are we currently, cyborgs?  
Well I know I am not a cyborg...

"Why you shouldn't date a soldier" collages and layers various portals of the World Wide Web and cyber culture. The composition is extremely stressful visually, was this your intention? How do you address the aesthetic of your work?

I like the idea of the images being stressful – I mix real architecture in the Middle East with sushi and Blackberries. I approach the aesthetic of the video by thinking about each individual frame – they all become sections of spaces and cells that are blown up, printed out or enlarged. Thinking about each frame as a separate space allows me to create a visually rich, bloody, hypnotic site for visual descriptions of performance, cyber and territory.

What limits do you face in your work? Technologically speaking? Theoretically speaking?

I feel that my practice both acknowledges and contests the limits of physical and technological boundaries. I am interested in the limit of something as a space in itself. I don't think my work sets out to address the borders between self and the world, or art and life, although obviously identity within territory is a concern. I think there is a big difference between presenting dichotomies, which I don't aim to do, and performing occupation, which I hope my videos begin to do.



## PHILIPPA FOUND, CURATOR

### **How did you come across these three particular artists and decide to curate them within The Body in Women's Art Now series?**

The idea of The Body in Women's Art Now exhibition series was to review woman's art since 2000 that focuses on the body, and suggest three themes that seem to have emerged in this last decade. Exhibition Part 3, *ReCreation*, focuses on the body in art works in which artists are using new technologies and exploring the impact of these new technologies on our body, its experience and its status.

Having looked at political performance based artworks in exhibition part 1 and its relation to the ground breaking feminist performance art of the 1960s and 1970s, and then representations of femininity and the body in exhibition part 2 (with reference to a development from the 'bad girls' movement of the 1990s), I ideally wanted Part 3 to be very forward looking, and suggestive of the future of the body. I was familiar with 1990s cyborg art and the attention to the extension of the body in art, but wanted to go beyond this and update this to suggest, in a generation of artists with access to Web 2.0 and this cultural shift, what was happening now with newer technologies; the internet, Facebook, second life generation.

Helen Carmel Benigson, one of the artists I represent at ROLLO Contemporary Art, was very much working in this terrain. At the time I started planning Body 3 she had just completed a video work 'Why U Shouldn't Date A Soldier' (which is included in the exhibition), which used footage from the video game 'Call of Duty', PKR Poker, YouPorn and Twitter, and was exploring the idea of the body's occupation of cyberspace, performance, fantasy and control. For me the work spoke addressed all the current technological issues I had been hoping to be able to explore, so knowing this work was out there, I set about identifying other artists who were making works in this vein, and then choosing the artists whose works complimented each others within the context of the exhibition by bringing different issues to the table within each themes – and selected the artworks that I believe are the strongest and most iconic works exploring these very current issues.

### **As your artists display, we perform hyper-gender roles through technology and our avatars; a constant masquerade. Are we truly empowered by technology and our avatars? At which point is our agency compromised?**

All the artists in *ReCreation* bring different responses and different angles to that question:

I see Miri Segal's *BRB* as very much addressing this issue. There is one scene in the thirty minute video documentary which I believe gets to the core of this issue: Towards the start of *BRB* we witness a conversation between philosophers around a campfire in Second Life, in which one of these avatars comments that she appreciates the non-flesh manner of the body in Second Life, which she believes allows the inhabitants to get right to the core of their 'selves'. It's an interesting proposition that suggests empowerment, in that the virtual body is suggested to be able to move beyond objectification and the burden of interpretation that one's real body commands. Later in the video, however, I believe this body-free 'empowerment' is undermined, as we witness two avatars having sex, where the male avatar asks the female avatar, "Are you touching yourself in real life?" suggesting that one needs a real body to give this fantasy any currency, and until we can feel virtually, the physical body will always be vital.

Benigson's work I believe most explicitly expresses the empowerment of the author of the avatar, versus the disempowerment of the receiver viewing or interacting with the online alter ego.

As an artist who we only know as an avatar – a representation – Gazira Babeli has been able to position her art aside from any biographical readings of the traditional artist, which in a way can be seen to be empowering.

Anne-Marie Schleiner's work, that doesn't deal with avatars, but with gaming culture and gender construction certainly can be seen to suggest how gender stereotypes can be exacerbated in the context of gaming, and agency is compromised by having to assume pre-constructed gender stereotypes. Her work goes further though, to suggest that even if we aren't active participants in gaming culture, these games are being utilized in domains far beyond the realm of the home video/computer, they are being employed in the training of the military, which pushes the idea of authority and control into a very different context.

**I'm interested in Donna Haraway's ideas surrounding the cyborg: this dissolution of gender through the notion of the cyborg. Do you think we are becoming, or are we currently, cyborgs?**

Gazira Babeli – as the artist and the avatar – could be seen to be a cyborg, and for me her presence as avatar artist absolutely embodies this idea of gender dissolution, but, ultimately, Gazira is inevitably a construction of a human – even if we don't know anything about that person – somewhere he/she exists in the traditional real life sense.

Even in the context of Second Life, real life is ever present – so, no – I don't think we are cyborgs yet. The artist's works in *ReCreation* explore a new terrain of representation and its impact on the body, but all of them (except perhaps Gazira's work) explicitly references the human body and its consumption, or reception, of these technological experiences.

Then again, when Donna Haraway spoke of us becoming 'condensed image of both imagination and material reality' I can see how our online profiles – our Facebook and our twitter pages – parading as reality but veiled in masquerade – could be seen to be an embodiment of this position!

**Where do you situate someone like Lady Gaga within this dialogue?**

I see her as the ultimate performance artist who performs the simulacrum of herself as well as of other artists (i.e. her Madonna like costumes/Elton John etc.). Rather than a cyborg, I see her ultimately as a performance artist.

**If there were to be a Part 4 to The Body in Women's Art Now series, which direction would it take?**

The exhibitions were always conceived as a three part series, and as such the series has deliberately ended on a very forward thinking, futuristic and cutting edge theme, which, through exhibition and catalogue, has aimed to expand the discourse on an art of art practice that given its currency has had very little critical attention, until now.

*The Body in Women's Art Now: Part 3- ReCreation on until 2 Mar 12 at ROLLO Contemporary Art London*

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## INTERFACE

Visual art exhibitions and events with a platform for critical writing



### REVIEW

#### The Body in Women's Art Now - ReCreation

Rollo Contemporary Art, London  
20 January - 2 March 2012

Reviewed by: [Viviane Blanchard »](#)

All-women festivals and retrospectives have flourished in the last decade, from the more alternative corners of culture (*Her Noise* at South London Gallery, Cinenova's *Bodies Assembling*, the current *Labour : Female Irish Culture* at Performance Space) to take centre stage in major institutions (*WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the MoCA in LA, *Elle@Centre Pompidou*, *Modern Women* at the MoMA, Tracey Emin and Pipilotti Rist at the Hayward in 2011). Whether a hip factor or the effect of the last 40 years of feminist activism, a wind of change is being felt in the curating of galleries and museums, with the Pompidou centre buying 40% of its women's art since 2005. The recent acquisition by the Whitworth gallery of Lynn Hershmann Leeson's complete edition of *Roberta Breitmore* comes as a remarkable achievement in our time of massive budget cuts, which predominantly affect minorities and women's art as the closing of the 2012 edition of the Bird Eye's View Film Festival can attest.

Philippa Found of Rollo Contemporary Art is working in the same curatorial vein. Since its first installment in 2009 the all-women travelling exhibition *The Body in Women's Art Now* seeks to raise awareness about the representation and status of women in the arts and to contribute in redressing the balance. It enfolds as a trilogy exploring the self and the issues of (dis-, re-) embodiment in our contemporary sensorium. Considering the centrality of the female body in art since time immemorial, the show contributes to furthering the discourse on the body in contemporary art while infusing it with a strong gender perspective.

The first part *Embodiment* presented the work of women that deal with pressing issues affecting bodies in time of war, mass consumerism and the neo-liberal crisis of consciousness. Focusing on the lived, embodied practice of performance, the show gave an update on both the 'personal is political' dimension of body art and the discourse of self-embodiment, which developed from, and criticized, the Foucauldian insights on the power relations at work in the self-disciplinary practice and social normalisation of bodies.

The second installment, *Flux*, was a frank and open dialogue on female sexuality, revealing the ambiguity, fluidity and mobility of female subjectivity and the potent, darker side of women's desire and pleasure. The corporeal transformation from childhood to adolescence, into the body of a mature woman showed the body as much as a source of alienation as the site of controllable pleasure and empowerment.

The current and last installment, *ReCreation*, sets bodies within the virtual time and space of web 2.0, social networking communities and video games. The advent of Second Life and increasingly sophisticated programming technology has rendered work and play in virtual corpo-reality as second nature for the new generation of artists working in new media. Updating Donna Haraway's 'ironic political myth' of the cyborg body, the four artists in the exhibition deliver a detached view of our contemporary self, not without a sense of derision and criticism.

The show begins with a strong, politically orientated docu-performance video by Anne Marie Schleiner, a gaming artist who intervenes simultaneously in the public space of online games and in the streets. Taking its name from the military term MOUT (Military Operations in Urban Terrain) used by numerous military simulation computers games such as America's Army (AA), *Operation Urban Terrain* (2004-6) is a criticism of the increasing militarization of society since 9/11 and its pernicious infiltration into civilian life.

Dressed as sexy Lara croft look-alikes and armed with computers and a projector, Schleiner and another female cyberhacker assault the streets of NYC and act out the games with projections on walls, garage doors and shop windows, juxtaposing concrete buildings and bodies on the pixilated playground. The playful interactions with passers-by and children jumping in front of the real projections/virtual shootings add a disquieting dimension to the performance. At a time when the streets are being reclaimed for social and economic justice, Schleiner's interventions seem all the more relevant to our lives which are increasingly played out on, and controlled by, the screen. Her team's critical gaming strategies include the creation of paint sprays for covering the walls of virtual cities with graffiti and making their avatars dance instead of shooting each other.

It also contains an explicit feminist critic of the macho world of the military and gaming industry, which perpetuates the image of the hero as typically male and white, while portraying women as highly sexualized and often violently powerful. When she is not a bombshell or a deadly cyborg, the woman depicted in videogames is the mother with child in need of protection. In *OUT*, the introduction video to the America's Army game starts with the sweeping view of a Middle Eastern desert town with a suitably westernized, oriental soundtrack in the background. A US military convoy is entering the town. Perched on a tank, a soldier waves to a woman and her baby standing in front of her house. The message, aimed at recruiting the youth of Middle America into 'The Strongest Force in the World', illustrates the gendered representations and imaginative geographies that have contributed in legitimizing the War on Terror and other masculine initiatives under the Bush administration. In typical orientalist fashion, women and children embody the weak and the helpless of an 'Other' world wrecked by dictators, and binaries such as good/evil or civilised/barbarian are used to entrench further the difference between us and them. Schleiner's critical strategies reveal the gendered visions of politics by playing on the binary codes of game/society, destabilizing gestures and bodies by performing them live in the street and subverting their gendered *imposition*.

Going deeper into the rabbit hole of gaming technology, Gazira Babeli and Mira Segal explore the parallel Internet universe of Second Life in all its trappings and possibilities. Contending that 'for me net.art is like the wild Middle Ages of the Internet... Second Life seems to offer a Renaissance Perspective', Babeli (or 'Gaz' as she is known online) performs directly in Second Life, taking unsuspecting avatars by surprise and upsetting the normal course of events staged there with her 'unauthorised performances', code-hacking 'grey goo' and earthquakes.

In *Anna Magnani/Take 2* (2007), she manipulates the code to make her avatar perform, in quick sequence and random order, all the facial expressions available on the application. In jerky, robotic fashion that precludes the infinite subtleties of human features, her face turns from scary frown to ecstatic grimace, and her upper body moves back-and-forth in gestures that recall the trope of the hysterical woman. Dressed in a military jacket that reveals her bazooka breasts, she appears as an aggressive crank, a misfit cyberpunk whose identity search is set on splitting the code, double-crossing the self, subverting the gender conservatism that persist behind and beyond the screen. This, ultimately, led to self-destruction. In 2010, her avatar died, an appropriate dada-esque exit of code-performance.

In the documentary film *BRB* (2007), Mira Segal also slipped into a second skin made of exotic virtual landscapes and various masks (including a Google search page printed on her face) and video-ed her experience in Second Life. We follow her and her assistant Iris, as

they rummage around a Gothic palace overlooking a green ocean at sunrise, staring awkwardly at people and bumping into pixelated walls – nostalgic remnant images of my Tomb Raider past. The then-popular game provided my first virtual, 'out-of-body' experience. Early VR theorist Anne Balsamo explains that 'a user experiences virtual reality through a disembodied gaze - a floating moving perspective that mimes the movement of a disembodied camera 'eye''. In the early 1990s, she viewed virtual environments as a 'new arena for the staging of the body' and suggested that VR would bring about a re-examination of the human body's limitations as much as its extensions.

Segal is interested by 'the question whether an image can touch you'. In *BRB*, she employs various animation techniques and equips the viewer with multiple perspectives, allowing us to follow her avatar's adventures both intimately and as distant voyeur. When passing through a public orgy, for instance, she films Iris's avatar, Roga, having sex with a boy. During intercourse Roga asks the boy 'are you touching yourself in real life?' at which point he disappears, leaving us with an uncanny impression of 'la petite mort'. Or, depending on one's point of view, a lame performance of virtual man's post-coitus withdrawal from reality. Is the possibility of getting out of undesirable situations at will and seemingly 'untouched' an expression of enhanced freedom? Second Life, as all our networking platforms that wire bodies to circuits of communication, isn't a realm of limitless fantasy but an alternative space mixing fancy flights of imagination and participatory actions that have real impacts on social life, emotions and the self. In this new perceptual realm in which we can simultaneously project and live our personal dramas, the question is not so much how far our bodies can extend as how responsible, feeling bodies can, and should, operate.

Segal's avatar spends interminable time hanging there, thinking alone or discussing the meaning of virtual life around fires with bodies that 'type' their words into the void instead of speaking them out. The faint, finger-tapping chit-chat on Second Life makes us acutely aware of our wired, noisy world riddled with pedestrians talking to ghosts via their portable technologies. Our bodies have already vanished, taking the small psycho-geographical step from the streets to Wonderland and lucidly-dreaming new ways of going about our evolution, relationships, sexuality, politics, and identity. In this process, our self is 'an image, a mental model... a dream body' as one of the jerky chimera of *Waking Life* points out. Segal's film reminds of the dreamlike visions of Linklater's animated film whose characters are drawn on top of real actors and thus perfectly mimic and exaggerate human bodily gestures and facial expressions. Their sketchy re-embodiment gives them a distant, spectral aura. Their philosophical musings on existentialism and our bio-technological evolution are revealed to us as if drawn from our collective unconscious. The distant viewpoint and dreamy soundscapes in Segal's work achieves a similar, contemplative, disembodied quality. Bodies are stiff, however, their gestures aren't fluid and easy as in a reverie and the glitches and frozen frames take us regularly back to the digital/genetic code and our technological/biologic dimension. Contemporary embodiment provokes and twists the jolting and splitting of interactive technology in our sensory system. This creatively self-dissociating and re-fashioning process is now proliferating as an aesthetic in its own right – the virtual glitches and possibilities within our biological existence work with social and cultural forces to produce a perpetually becoming state-of-body.

Helen Carmel Beningson's techno-pop fantasies illustrate the creative self-fashioning of our contemporary moment. Her works are a repertory of signs picked from pop culture, TV reality, music and online games where girls are playing an increasingly active role. In the spirit of the girl culture/power of the 1990's, she infuses her mix of performance, video, print, sculpture and installations with a hyper-feminine sensitivity saturated with brash, pink colors, acidulated flavours and assertive, sardonic statements. The video *Why You Shouldn't Date A Soldier* (2011) feels like a daydream juxtaposing her net incursions into a Poker game forum where she wins a few hands, and a parallel narrative where her avatar, Princess, is being 'rescued' by a bunch of soldiers coming straight from the video game *Call of Duty*. Her favourite things such as sushi and palm trees float around. Meanwhile the soldiers, which we see as a first-person account, holding our gun, make a detour to YouPorn to interrogate 'prison babe' – a shot of the YouPorn clip is on full view – we have switched from male hero to voyeur. When the soldiers arrive at the forum's threshold, she sends them off with a text-poem: 'boys. i didn't want to be rescued. i am in control of my own destiny and my own fantasy' and she transports us far away from there, in a safe, pink world of her own. Asserting her agency over her life and sexuality while poking fun at boys' one-track mind and in-your-face fantasies, Beningson doesn't so much subvert the girl culture she represents than rejoices in it, playing with its codes and confusing the viewer as to whom exactly she thinks she is.

Back in 1998, Rosi Braidotti said that 'cyberfeminism needs to cultivate a culture of joy and affirmation...Nowadays, women have to undertake the dance through cyberspace, if only to make sure that the joy-sticks of cyberspace cowboys will not reproduce univocal phallicity under the mask of multiplicity'. Revealing subtle issues of gender representation online or explicitly negotiating strategies of genderfusion and hybridity to combat stereotyping, the women artists in *ReCreation* have successfully translated into practice some of the political aspirations of cyberfeminism. Anne Marie Schleiner's engaged feminist politics on the net deals more broadly with the question of the embodied state, and contributes to the, often neglected, debate on the body politics' salience for understanding state-community relations, political sovereignty and social equality.

The curator, Philippa Found, believes that women have a very unique relationship to the body in art and has presented their works as part of the art historical discourse of the body - which experienced a renaissance following the feminist art movement of the 1970s. This theoretical framing is, arguably, what had been missing to create a visible women's body of art in the digital age. Faith Wilding's invitation to imagine 'cyberfeminist theorists teaming up with brash and cunning grrl net artists to visualize new female representations of bodies, languages, and subjectivities in cyberspace' has finally become real.

Writer detail:

Viviane Blanchard is an art historian and writer, with a particular interest in sound art and the gender perspective.

Venue detail:

[Rollo Contemporary Art »](#)

51 Cleveland Street, LONDON W1T 4JH



Date: 02 Feb 2012

The Body In Women's Art Now, Helen Carmel Benigson, Gazira Babeli, Anne Marie Schleiner, Miri Segal



## The Body In Women's Art Now At Rollo

### ***The Body in Women's Art Now: Part 3 – ReCreation @ Rollo Contemporary – REVIEW***

Contemporary artists have been rather slow on the up-take when it comes to contemporary media – perhaps disregarding the messy world (wide web) of the internet happenings as the realm of spotty teens rather than rather than of discourse-orientated artistes. But the artist's in Rollo's new show are refreshingly different, with the gallery bringing together works from four different glitch-based practices, that share a delight in the pop and pixel of all things digital.

Helen Carmel Benigson is the big name amongst the four, recently described in the Independent as 'A Pipilotti Rist for a harder, more media-savvy generation', and tipped by those in the know (apparently) to make it big. Consequently her work is given the largest showing, including a ceiling to floor scroll of tweets by alter-ego Princess Belsize Dollar, and the transcript of an improvised erotic rap delivered down the phone to an unsuspecting victim – who understandably hangs up upon the barrage of 'glistening creamy milky ahh dripping pouring sexy wet'. Comparisons to Rist are understandable, with both artists bathing their work in saturated colours and psychedelic patterns. But, beyond visual parallels, the two artists could not be more different; while Rist projects psychic visions mined from self, Benigson is in the business of

appropriation – adopting and adapting imagery from external culture to create a sickening, swirling remix; a crazy mirror of contemporary visual languages.

*Part 3 – ReCreation* is the final exhibition in Rollo's *The Body in Women's Art Now* series, with a mission to examine the altered status and experience of the body in relation to new media and technologies – 'the impact of technology on bodily interaction and bodily capabilities'. Thus Benigson video work is that which most aligns her with the rest of the work in the show, being the piece that most explicitly addresses questions of gender and its relation to new technologies. Mashing-up scenes from a first-person-shooter game with online virtual Poker, she plays out a narrative of gender stereotypes in which macho commandos strive towards the heroic rescue of a reluctant princess avatar at the poker table. The piece alludes to the regressive gender constructions typical of the virtual world, the with the princess both physically tailored to male erotic desire, and violently denied the ability to follow her own (economic?) imperatives.

This neo-feminism is the thread that runs throughout. Miri Segal's video piece BRB, for instance, contains an epic scene of lesbian-avatar intercourse, with two corpselike fantasy images going through the motions of passion. But, genital-less, we are given a horrific and impotent vision of male desire, objectifying and sanitising the female body into something sub-human – titillating but safely neutered. Similarly (although with less success), Anne-Marie Schleiner plays with sexualised tropes of game-dom, donning the absurdly skimpy outfit of Lara Croft as she traverses the streets of New York, staging 'wireless gaming interventions' (also known as 'playing a computer game in public').

Ultimately, Rollo ought to be applauded in their effort to bring together the work of these IT girls (if you'll excuse the phrase for the sake of a pun), and their messily pioneer practices, genuinely contemporary in their open-eyed engagement with an all-pervasive technological culture. **Words Thomas Keane © 2011 ArtLyst**

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# ARTslant

## London

The Slant



The Body in Women's Art Now: Part 3  
by Alex Field

[\*The Body in Women's Art Now: Part 3- ReCreation\*](#)

Helen Carmel Benigson, Anne-Marie Schleiner, Miri Segal  
ROLLO Contemporary Art  
51 Cleveland Street , London W1T 4JH, United Kingdom  
20 January 2012 - 02 March 2012

I remember that feeling of starting university, the intense mix of abject fear and incredible newfound liberty. Moving to a new place and being surrounded by new people, free to re-invent yourself. Now, with the rise and rise of social media, the opportunities for self re-invention have multiplied. We can highlight our halcyon days via Facebook, edit our tweets in a way you can never practice a conversation and even create a whole new persona on Second Life. We're free to manipulate the way in which we are seen by the online world, and to engage with the personas others have created - people we will never know in reality.

I wasn't aware of 'gaming art' before this week. It's not unusual to roll your eyes at Lara Croft and label her the creation of the male-dominated gaming industry. But what happens when a woman gets to pick her own avatar? You can change her hair and eye colour, dress her up and change her body shape. Yet we start with a mould that is familiarly proportioned.



**Anne-Marie Schleiner**, *Operation Urban Terrain (O.U.T.)*, 2004-6, Video and Electronic Performance; Courtesy ROLLO Contemporary Art

The predominance for large-breasted, tiny-waisted, leggy girls in computer games is highlighted by Anne-Marie Schleiner in her video and electronic piece *Operation Urban Terrain* (2004-6), in which she and another female gaming artist played out a computer game in real-time on the streets of New York - wearing just leather hot-pants and a black vest. In doing so the artist translated the virtual body back into real terms, reversing the usual process of a real body being sent into cyberspace as lines of code.

Miri Segal, in contrast, executes her entire thirty-minute video work *BRB* (2007) as a Second Life character, moving between spaces reserved for different activities, from philosophical discussions to art displays and orgies. This raises questions about why we use social media and especially sites like Second Life. Is it just so that we can live out scenarios that we would never encounter in reality, for fun and entertainment, or is there a darker implication, that we are fundamentally dissatisfied with our lives and seek to escape into a fantasy world where our bodies are perfect and boundaries don't exist? This is the controversy at heart of the online alter-reality debate.



Gazira Babeli, *Ana Magnani/take2*, 2007, Video 3 minutes 50 seconds; Courtesy ROLLO Contemporary Art

The issue is further explored in Gazira Babeli's *Ana Magnani/take 2* (2007), in which the artist also exists as a Second Life avatar, but rather than living as a 'character', she creates performance art enacted online. Here Babeli uses computer coding to manipulate her avatar's face into each of the facial expressions available on the site in quick succession, using her online existence as a medium for performance.

Gaming art reinforces the extent to which our online interactions are performances, from Facebook status updates to LinkedIn comments, as we strive to make our audience believe that we are worth listening to. Indeed, whilst this show emphasises the online environment is an unrivalled space for experimentation, it also underlines how easy it is to become unstuck from reality.

--[Alex Field](#)

(Image at top: **Miri Segal**, from the video *BRB*, 2007, 30 minutes; Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv)

<http://www.artslant.com/lon/articles/show/29836>

# The Flaneur

## Interview: Philippa Found, Curator of The Body in Women's Art Now, Part 3: ReCreation

by [Francesca Brooks](#) on Feb 12, 2012 • 5:18 pm



Gazira Babeli- Anna Magnani/take 2, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Fabio Paris Gallery

I first met Philippa Found, Director of the ROLLO Gallery and curator of the *Body in Women's Art Now* exhibition series, when I was still a student, at the private view of *Part 1: Embodied* in the New Hall Art Collection. Three years and three exhibitions later I have come to Cleveland Street to see the final part in its home, the ROLLO gallery.

This exhibition includes digital work; videos, both montages and documentaries, along with performance art works by avatars and Twitter transcripts, by the artists Gazira Babeli, Helen Carmel Benigson, Anne-Marie Schleiner and Miri Segal.

I admire Found because her approach is academic, and curation, particularly in commercial galleries, does not need to be academic. Inspired by Tracey Warr's book on *The Artist's Body* Found's intention was to curate three shows which would represent the next three chapters of the book, exploring the body in women's art from the year 2000 onwards.

Three years ago Found had only a sketch of a plan for the genesis of the series; part 2 and 3 were provisionally 'Transgressive Bodies' and 'The Body Remade' but have grown to become 'Flux' and 'Recreation'.

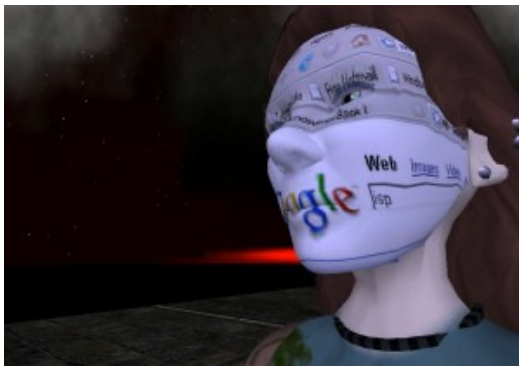


Helen Carmel Benigson- Why U Shouldn't Date A Soldier, 2011, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art

I want to know if the realisation has matched Found's initial vision? In many ways it seems to have exceeded expectations; 'Recreation' looks towards the future, it is examining the "new" in its exposure of an emerging interest in the relationship between art and digital technologies. Found believes the shows have come 'full cycle'; while Part 1 still bore the traces of work from the 60s and 70s, and Part 2 the bad girls of the 90s, Part 3 looks definitively and affirmatively towards the future.

Found's work with the ROLLO-represented artist Helen Carmel Benigson, rapper alias Princess Belsize Dollar and spunky multimedia artist skypeing performances from LA, has led her towards the theme of Part 3. Benigson was included in Part 2, but now her printed scroll of Tweets 'Tweeting Even Though No-One is Listening' and her video 'Why U Shouldn't Date a Soldier', layering clips from You-Porn with chat rooms of internet gambling forums and bright cut-outs of sushi, in Part 3, are a window onto Found's moment of curatorial revelation. Benigson is fiercely working with new media and this led Found to the realisation that other artists must be doing the same.

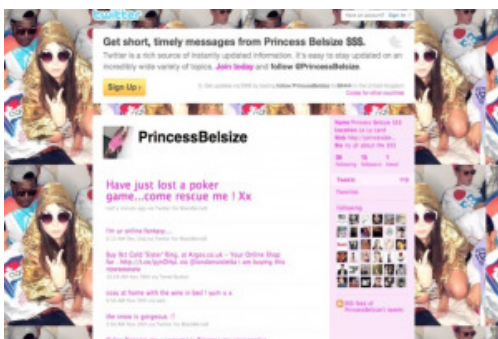
The body has been the unifying theme in all three of Found's exhibition chapters; a breeding ground of tension and challenge in which the oppressive confines of the art historical can be transgressed or subverted, destroyed and remade. Reflecting on 'Part 1: Embodied' and the visceral works of Sigalit Landau or Jessica Lagunas, the idea of 'Recreation's' potentially 'disembodied' bodies is pertinent. How corporeal can these digital bodies be?



Miri Segal- BRB, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Dvir Gallery

They might seem to be ephemeral, touching only our retinas and certainly not tactile in the way that Nathalie Djurberg's Claymation or Cecily Brown's painting is (Part 2: Flux). And how elusive does an artist like Gazira Babeli seem when her only public profile is her Avatar-shown here running through all the possible expressions available to her on Second Life?

But Babeli refers to her work as 'sculpture' and 'performance art', describing digital in terms of more traditional media. We may view digital works as being the most 'ephemeral' of all art forms and yet there is a digital archive for Second Life, Locus, which means that Babeli's performance art works executed in front of unsuspecting Avatars are recorded for posterity. They will not 'deteriorate' in the way a painting might.



Helen Carmel Benigson- Tweeting Even Though No-one Is Listening, 2011, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art

The works on show are the beginning of a conceptual exploration of the 'new tools' of digital media. Both Miri Segal's 30 minute video of Second Life 'BRB' and Anne-Marie Schleiner's 'Operation Urban Terrain (OUT)' which takes the military training video MOOT as its point of interest, are kinds of documentary which embody a digital world in order to explore its physical limits.

In 'BRB' after a long, intense and graphic sex scene between two avatars the question 'Are you touching yourself in real life?' is asked. Segal's video becomes an ironic look at the boundaries between fantasy and reality on Second Life, where ultimately the digital is only a

cipher. The scene lacks intimacy when it can be 'enacted at the click of a button', and the discomfort we feel is less about its explicit content and more about the queasy surreal nature of seeking sex through avatars on the internet.

Throughout the series there has been a preoccupation with the viewer, and in particular the male viewer's gaze. "The naked female body has the problem of being sexualised, in the reductionist eyes of the male" and this has been a fear even with powerfully political work such as Landau's.

In Part 3 the female bodies seem to follow the design of the male ideal; Benigson can reduce the size of her waist while her chest enlarges; Schleiner dresses up a la Lara Croft to play Moot out on the street, until they seem no more realistic than "mannequins", or blow-up dolls. Found believes their work represents an "exposure" of this problematic body which is such a pervasive image in our contemporary psychology. 'ReCreation' looks to the future in recognising that women artist's still must fight for the female body, but that the body at the centre of the struggle has changed, it has been ReCreated.

ReCreation might lack the "celebrity names" of Tracey Emin and Cecily Brown which made Part 1 and 2 a draw, but Found suspects that this concluding part will generate the largest response: "I think journalists recognise that this is cutting edge, something new." One day we will look back at the phenomenon of digital and internet art and *The Body in Women's Art Now: ReCreation* will be somewhere at the beginning of it all.

***The Body in Women's Art Now, Part 3:Recreation* will be at the ROLLO Gallery, London until the 2nd March 2012 [www.rolloart.com](http://www.rolloart.com)**

## TOMO Creative: Dirty Loves



### [The Body in Women's Art Now: Part 3 – ReCreation](#)

January 25, 2012 [Art](#)



This winter will see the opening of the hotly anticipated exhibition, *ReCreation*, the final installment in the critically acclaimed three-part series *The Body in Women's Art Now*, curated by Philippa Found, Gallery Director of ROLLO Contemporary Art.

The exhibition series displays works created by women artists since 2000 in which the body plays a central part. Each exhibition focuses on a different theme that has emerged in this area in the last decade. Over the series, the exhibitions aim to present a new generation of women artists developing and reassessing the discourse around the body.

To date the exhibition series has included works by internationally acclaimed artists – Tracey Emin, Cecily Brown, Nathalie Djurberg, Sigalit Landau, Regina Jose Galindo – alongside young up and coming artists - Sarah Lederman and Helen Carmel Benigson – who have both been tipped as Artists To Watch in national press. *The Body in Women's Art Now Part 3* propels the exhibition series into the future bringing cutting edge works by Miri Segal, Gazira Babeli, Anne-Marie Schleiner and Helen Carmel Benigson into focus.

The final exhibition in the series, *The Body in Women's Art Now: Part 3 – ReCreation*, brings together interactive artworks, video-art, video-game art, prints and performance-video work by some of today's most cutting edge artists. In using new technologies and utilizing the internet as a source material through Second Life, Google, Twitter and Facebook, the artists comment upon our shifting status and experience in a technologically-driven world and its impact on the body.

20<sup>th</sup> January – 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2012 ROLLO Contemporary Art, London

[www.rolloart.com](http://www.rolloart.com)



- Gazira Babeli- Anna Magnani/take 2, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Fabio Paris Gallery
- Helen Carmel Benigson- Why U Shouldn't Date A Soldier, 2011, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art
- Helen Carmel Benigson- Tweeting Even Though No-one Is Listening, 2011, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art
- Anne-Marie Schleiner- Operation Urban Terrain (O.U.T.), 2004- 2006, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art
- Miri Segal- BRB, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Dvir Gallery

<http://magazine.dirtyloves.com/category/art/>



## The Body in Women's Art Now

Posted on [January 24, 2012](#)

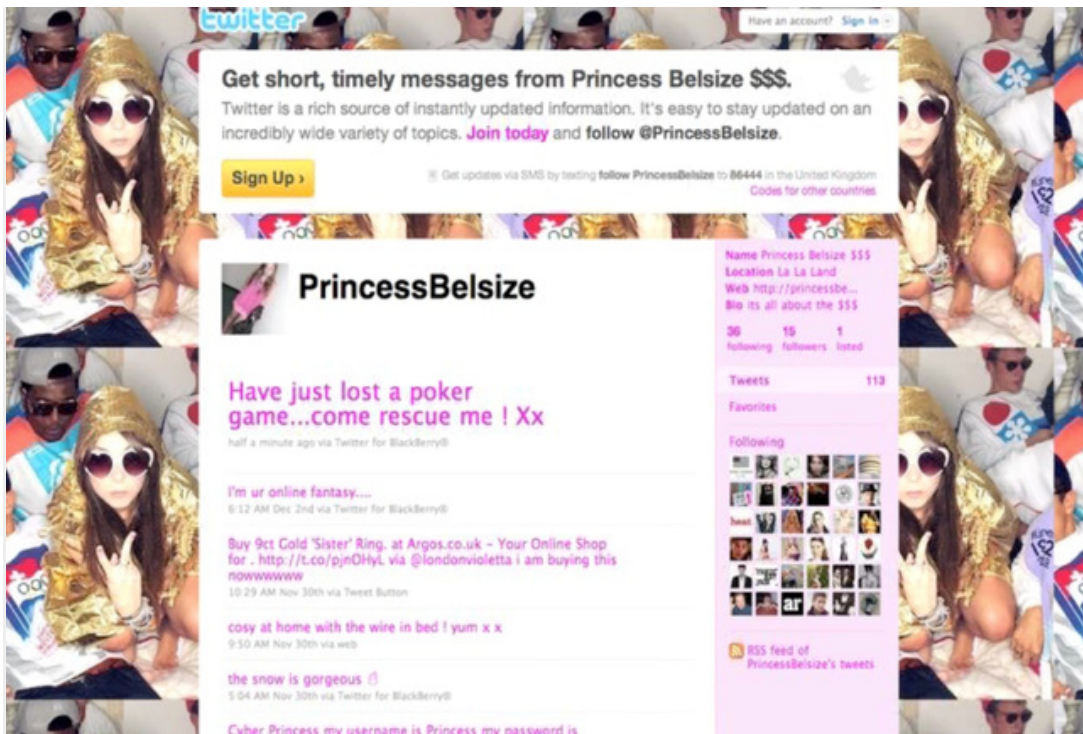
**The Body in Women's Art Now, Part 3 – ReCreation**

**ROLLO Contemporary Art**

**20 January – 2 March 2012**

*by Anna McNay*

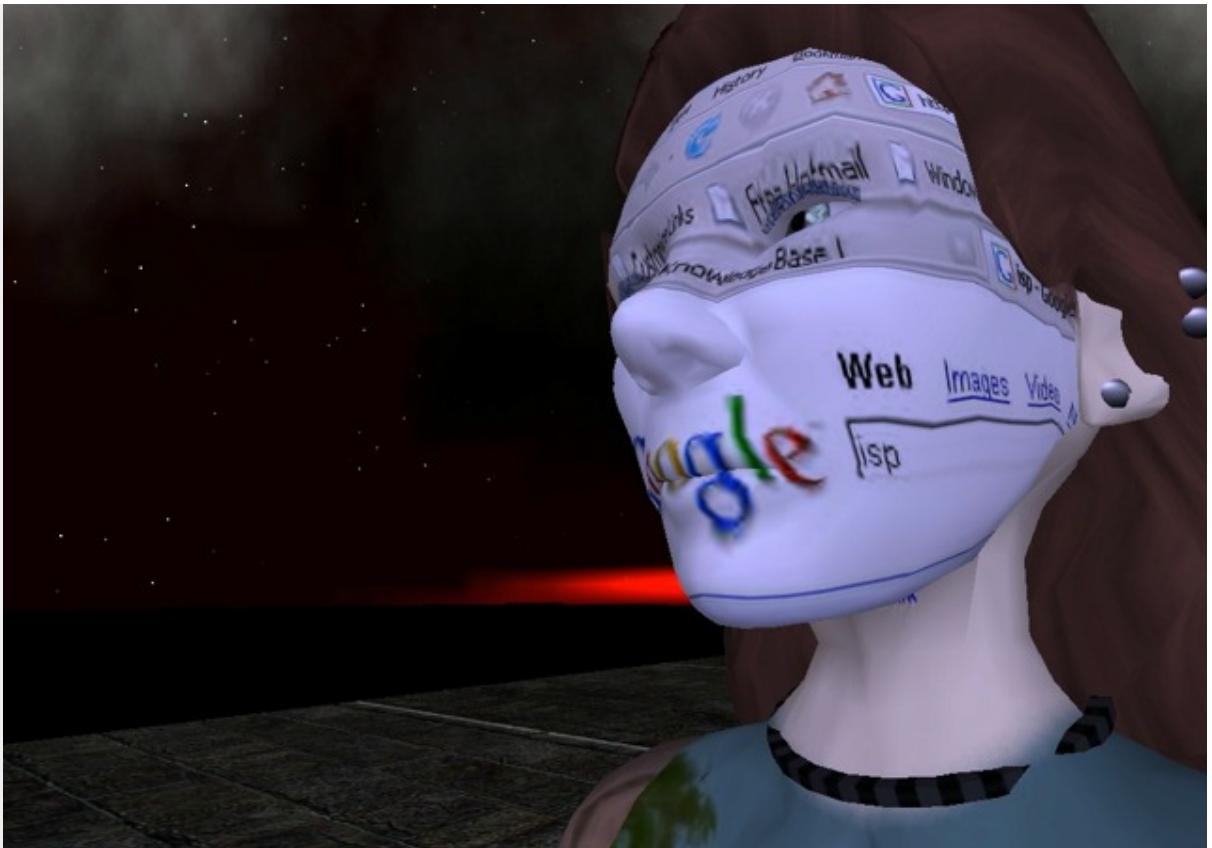
Philippa Found, the director of ROLLO Contemporary Art, initiated the three part exhibition, *The Body in Women's Art Now*, in 2009, as a response to the massive under-representation of women artists in the canon of western art history. Of the 2,300 works on show in the National Gallery, for example, just four of these are paintings by women artists, and, at Tate Modern, women artists represent just 12% of the collection, with only 29% of solo exhibitions between 2000-2009 representing women artists' work [Philippa Found, 'Lifting the Barriers,' foreword in catalogue to accompany *The Body in Women's Art Now, Part 1 – Embodied*, 2009] Since the early years of the feminist art movement, in the 1960s and 70s, the body has played a key role in many women artists' work as they have sought to reclaim its image from the male gaze of earlier centuries. The three exhibitions in this series, which have each been shown at ROLLO Contemporary Art in London and at the New Hall Art Collection in Cambridge, concentrate on work created by a range of international women artists since the year 2000 in which the body is a central component.



Helen Carmel Benigson- Tweeting Even Though No-one Is Listening, 2011, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art

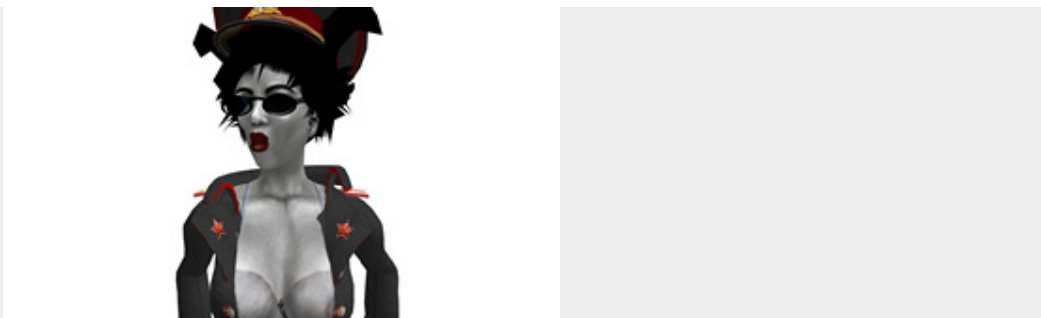
The Body in Women's Art Now, Part 3 – ReCreation, could be seen to step even beyond the here and now and to take a look into the future, bringing together interactive performance artworks, electronic performance video art and video artworks created entirely online. Its works still all include a body, or bodies, of sorts, but, in each case, this body is a virtual one, an avatar, existing only in the realm of cyber space. Questions are therefore raised about the creation and manipulation of identity, and whether or not such virtual interaction frees us from our bodily concerns and hang ups, as we design and project whatever image we wish. The works also explore and question new types of interaction and relationships arising since the invention of Web 2.0 (i.e. user-generated content websites, such as blogs, social networking, etc.) around 2004.

At 30 minutes in length, the longest work in the show, and, if you ask me, this is perhaps demanding a little too much of an attention span from the fast fix, computer game generation audience, is Israeli born artist Miri Segal's BRB (2007). Set in Second Life, we see her avatar Muzza interacting in a variety of circumstances, including a philosophical discussion, a virtual gallery set in space, and various public orgies. Couples meet, talk, kiss and make love, whilst offering explicit descriptions of what they're doing: 'do you want me inside you darling?' Communication is textual, not verbal, with type written words appearing across the screen, and a further reminder of the virtual nature of it all is the occasional flashing of the cursor on the screen. Whilst the action is visually occurring between the cyber characters, however, we are also reminded of the real life controllers behind the scenes as one avatar asks the other: 'are you touching yourself in RL [real life]?' As Philippa Found suggests in her introduction to the accompanying catalogue, this is a keen reinforcement of the necessity of a physical body in order to actually feel.



Miri Segal- BRB, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Dvir Gallery

Similarly set in Second Life, but much simpler, and, to my mind, more effective, is Gazira Babeli's *Anna Magnani/take 2* (2007). The artist, herself an avatar, was born in 2006 in Second Life, and her 'acts' have all been interjected live in front of unsuspecting avatar audiences. This particular work is made up of a random sequence (generated by a computer code) of all the facial expressions available on Second Life.



Gazira Babeli- *Anna Magnani/take 2*, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Fabio Paris Gallery

As such, it explores the semiotics of expression and gesture, a code performance in a wordless language, with the movement of just the mouth, head, eyebrows, hand and tongue. Nonetheless, emotions as varied as joy, horror, sadness, disgust, fear and boredom are all adequately portrayed. Can a virtual being therefore really feel after all? Or do we just project these human states on to our virtual alter egos? The work is a powerful comment on the performative aspect of identity, both in virtual space and reality.

Bringing the viewer back into a real world space, Anne-Marie Schleiner's *Operation Urban Terrain (O.U.T.)* (2004-2006) presents a video of a performance, whereby she and

a friend, dressed in Lara Croft outfits, play out scenes from a violent video game used to train the US military.



Anne-Marie Schleiner- Operation Urban Terrain (O.U.T.), 2004- 2006, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art

This is interspersed with clips from the game itself, excerpts from US news reels, and actual military training footage. A response to the prevalence and military use of such violent video games, the political message of this work is amplified and expanded through its parallel consideration of representations of gender and implicit comment on the sexualisation of the female body in the male dominated gaming industry.



Guns and soldiers are also popular motifs in the works of Helen Carmel Benigson (aka Princess Belsize Dollar). Her video work *Why U Shouldn't Date a Soldier* (2011) contains footage from the controversial computer game *Call of Duty*, the online poker game *PKR*, the websites *youporn* and *twitter*, and her readily recognisable real life imagery shot in Israel, South Africa, and England.



Helen Carmel Benigson- *Why U Shouldn't Date A Soldier*, 2011, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art

The short animation tells the story of Cyber Princess, the artist's avatar, whom we see, initially, being created in Benigson's own likeness, and who then goes off into cyber space to play a game of poker on *PKR*. At this point, some soldiers receive a blackberry message and believe the princess to be captured online, so they gallantly set off to rescue her, albeit detouring via *youporn* for a quick sexual fix. Finally they find and rescue her, fairy tale stylee, but Princess' response is not quite the traditional one of falling at their feet: 'boys. I didn't want to be rescued. I am in control of my own destiny and my own fantasy.' As with Schleiner, Benigson explores the politics of sexual difference and female empowerment, and as with Segal and Babeli, she looks at the nature of identity, performance, and masquerade. Speaking of her use of today's multimedia technologies in her work, Benigson explains:

'There is now a new space to work about and in – that of online and cyber. My work is concerned with biology and technology and how new currents of information and communications are changing. This can be seen in our own schizophrenic performances on a daily basis.'

Thus there is, despite the immersion in virtual reality, a continual reference, in each artist's work, back to the real body and real life, not necessarily to privilege it, but to remind the viewer of the difference between reality and virtuality, and of the possibilities and limitations of each existence. As Cadence Kinsey suggests in 'Toward Embodiment,' her essay in the catalogue to accompany the exhibition, we are looking here at embodiment as opposed to the body per se. Embodiment can encompass subject positions that are no longer bounded by categories of race, gender and species. It is beyond materiality and can be virtual as well as real, created as well as born. It is perhaps no

coincidence then that the subtitle of part one of this exhibition was, in fact, embodiment. It therefore seems we have come full circle in our exploration of 21st century women's art, and Found's three part exhibition has certainly provided a strong basis from which to open up discussion and continue expanding the canon from a less androcentric viewpoint.

*Anna McNay is a London-based writer, curator and researcher. She has an academic background as a doctoral candidate, tutor, and lecturer in German and Linguistics at the University of Oxford, and as an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellow at the Humboldt University in Berlin. She is also a qualified and experienced CELTA tutor. You can read [her own blog here](#)*

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# Lisa Snook posterous

January 25, 2012

## The Body In Women's Art Now - Part 3 - RECREATION - at The Rollo Gallery

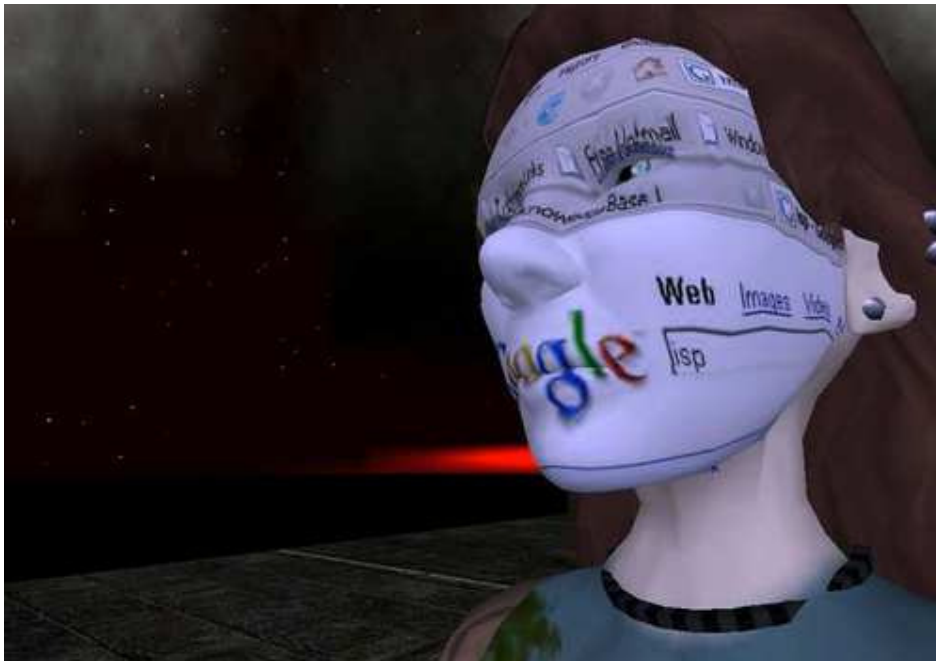
The Body In Women's Art Now Part 3 – Recreation - 20th January - 2nd March 2012

Including works by -

Gazira Babeli, Helen Carmel Benigson, Anne-Marie schleiner and Miri Segal

I was pleased to be asked by the curator Philippa Found to review the third and final installment of The Body In Women's Art Now show at the Rollo Gallery.

The series of shows have each looked at how the body is still a central theme in contemporary art practise and mainstream culture today. From the body as a site of political engagement and cultural identity to 'the presentation of the body as a site of instability and flux' and to its present theme where the 'real' and physical body has been removed and re-placed with a virtual substitute.



Miri Segal- BRB, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Dvir Gallery

In this show the body is propelled into cyber space. The physical form is manufactured with new technologies and becomes a matrix of identities. The visceral qualities of earlier works such as Barbed Hula by Sigalit Landau where we see a still from her video of a naked women spinning a hula hoop of barbed wire around her waist, are in stark contrast to the mechanical movements of the artists generated avatars of the flat screen, where emotional engagement or empathy is left numbed.

The works are extremely submersive and it is very easy to get lost within these fantasy realms, a point the artists are trying to make and in particular with Helen Carmel Benigsons piece, Why U shouldn't Date a Soldier. Benigson has assimilated footage from the game Call of Duty, PKR and YouPorn and takes us on a virtual journey with her avatar Cyber Princess. Here we witness the engineering of the avatar as she is created and then join her at PKR for some online poker. Toying with the tradition role play of femme fatal and rescuing male the cyber princess puts out a distress call via her Blackberry to soldiers involved in the game Call of Duty. The heroes respond with macho bravado, including a pitt stop at YouPorn and eventually arriving at PKR to claim their heroes welcome only to be told 'Boys I didn't want to be rescued I am in control of my own destiny and my own fantasy'. The narrative element of this video allows you to identify with the main protagonist and rather like a fairy tale the cautionary message is one of declaring female assertiveness and stamps its brand of punchy feminism with an ironic tone.



Helen Carmel Benigson- Why U Shouldn't Date A Soldier, 2011, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art

In the accompanying catalogue Philippa Found asks the question,

"Has Second Life found a way to exist with a mind/body split whereby the body is redundant and the mind (self) is free of the burden of outsiders objectification of it?"

It's an interesting perspective, notions of objectivity within feminist discourse are perennially challenged and the question of how technology has influenced and has been influenced by systems of representation in the gaming industry and online sites such as second life is at the heart of what this group of artists are engaging with. The construction of identity in terms of its historical ontological

importance has always been linked to its socio/political and cultural environment and the one we are being presented with at ReCreation is a myriad of possibilities, a virtual equivalent of a Mr. Ben's wardrobe, with a slightly more sophisticated wardrobe. Within the already defined (by computer programmers) menu of delights we can create for ourselves a projected self, and, like a child playing with a doll we can act out our fantasies, fears and explore other people's as well. The artists in this show have taken these ideas one step further and gone beyond the personal, creating alter egos that parody the modern cyber savvy female in control of her sexuality. Or the over sexualized fantasy that the character Lara Croft fulfils for the stay at home gaming geeks and asks us to take a closer look at what kind of freedom we are being offered.



Miri Segal- BRB, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Dvir Gallery



Anne-Marie Schleiner- Operation Urban Terrain (O.U.T.), 2004- 2006, Courtesy of the Artist and ROLLO Contemporary Art

I couldn't help being reminded of the film Bladerunner when Domenico Quaranta, in her essay – Disembodied? Identity Construction in a Constructed World, recounts a story between the artist Babeli and a woman named Pat, a story of an unexplained and unexpected email correspondence between Babeli and a stranger named Pat. Babeli experiences feelings of loss after she loses contact with Pat and states,

“I miss her. Though she was a complete construction, she is still, in my mind, a more real, rich and complex human than most of the people I have ever met in my life.” Pat's construction is comparable to when J.F. Sebastian says in the film,

“They're my friends, I make them.”



Gazira Babeli- Anna Magnani/take 2, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Fabio Paris Gallery

The overall effect from seeing the works is how easy it has been for the software and gaming industries to implemented and integrate stereotypes and modes of objectified representation within these technologies. It acts as a warning to the supposed disembodiment of the virtual as somehow 'not real'. These new technologies are a 'tool' with a plethora of possible uses, some good, some bad. But like all good art it provokes a reaction and mine is to stay firmly within the flesh with all its imperfections and idiosyncratic beauties.



Miri Segal- BRB, 2007, Courtesy of the Artist, ROLLO Contemporary Art and Dvir Gallery

• 0 responses

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Comment

## L'émission du 24 janvier

**Le corps féminin** est une source inépuisable de sujets qui remplissent les colonnes des journaux, des blogs, des images à la télé. On le scrute, on le glorifie, on l'analyse sous le microscope, on le coupe et on le découpe. Après on s'arrête et on se demande si on n'est pas allé un peu trop loin. **Une petite exposition met en valeur ce grand sujet à Londres à travers le regard des femmes artistes. Nous avons invité Antoinette Godin pour rajouter une couche sur ce débat sans fin.**

The Body in Women's Art Now

Rollo Contemporary Art

51 Cleveland Street London W1T 4JH



(Helen Carmen Benigson)

<http://www.frenchradiolondon>

## art-Corpus

cor·pus /kôrpəs/ n. pl. cor·po·ra (-pr-) 1. A large collection of writings of a specific kind or on a specific subject. 2. A collection of writings or recorded remarks used for linguistic analysis. 3. The main part of a bodily structure or organ. //Reviews of art. Art and language. Art and the body.

**Tuesday, 24 January 2012**

**Review of The Body in Women's Art Now, Part 3 – ReCreation at ROLLO Contemporary Art by Anna McNay**

24/01/12

### **The Body in Women's Art Now Part 3 – ReCreation**

**ROLLO Contemporary Art  
20 January – 2 March 2012**

Philippa Found, the director of ROLLO Contemporary Art, initiated the three part exhibition, The Body in Women's Art Now, in 2009, as a response to the massive under-representation of women artists in the canon of western art history. Of the 2,300 works on show in the National Gallery, for example, just four of these are paintings by women artists, and, at Tate Modern, women artists represent just 12% of the collection, with only 29% of solo exhibitions between 2000-2009 representing women artists' work. Since the early years of the feminist art movement, in the 1960s and 70s, the body has played a key role in many women artists' work as they have sought to reclaim its image from the male gaze of earlier centuries. The three exhibitions in this series, which have each been shown at ROLLO Contemporary Art in London and at the New Hall Art Collection in Cambridge, concentrate on work created by a range of international women artists since the year 2000 in which the body is a central component.

