

# RACHEL KOOLEN

## *Swallow A Bird*

Opening: April 24th, 5-8 pm

Exhibition period ends: May 24th

Gallery opening hours: Wednesday – Friday 12-5.30 pm, Saturday 12-4 pm

### Acceptance of the Hormone:

A reflection on the tension relieving process and practice of Rachel Koolen

*There it was, spread out, strung and hung high as if now a proud banner for the dialectically opposed. I wasn't actually there to see the exhibition, but I heard about it, saw pictures, and I saw something that used to be mine, all cut up like black and white ceramic pieces, ready to be laid as bathroom floor tile. She fuckin used my leather cushion and she took the whole damn harlequin thing apart without even asking. Granted, it was left there after moving, so I can't really still claim it as mine, I just thought that it would've (obviously) continued its existence as a soft, leather cushion stool, both visually & physically pleasing. The worst is that I can envision her now, tearing into it, ripping it at the seams with hair in her eyes; quality lambs wool pellet cushion filling fuckin flying everywhere. Lacerating it as if some green Hulk hero hormone was overtaking her. Sturdy sinuous waxed thread would be no match for her steroid strength, no matter how artisanally well made. I don't even know what she ended up titling it.*

*D. february 2013*

We believe that any given process originates in an unpleasant state of tension and thereupon determines for itself such a path that its ultimate outcome coincides with a relaxation of this tension, that is, avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure.<sup>1</sup> That's what Freud said regarding process and mental events towards pleasure. So what if 'any given process' was extended to any given object: That any given object finding itself in an unpleasant state of final tension is thereupon relaxed of this tension, relieved of its purpose, even if relieving means a stricter condemnation of interpretation, inciting a purer meaning of an object or material's inherent properties. What if the role of the tension reliever is fulfilled by the artist?

And such is observed this driving undercurrent in the practice of Rachel Koolen: Releasing original tension and re-binding that release, while definitely producing self-pleasure in the process. After all, aren't pinnacle isosceles triangles, whether in leather or plastic, a celebratory symbol? Better meant to be proudly hung as a pennant banner rather than to be sat upon and hence visually ignored?

*She has a keen attraction for fabric patterns and textures, so when I was in Japan a year ago, I met with a tailor to select the right colors and print for a kimono to be specially made for her. I never saw her wear it; perhaps it was too exotic, erotic or intimate. Then one weekend, helping her out in the studio, there it was, wrapped, stretched, bound and hanging limp, framed within a wooden structure. She told me it would best fulfill its meaning as a participating element for her next work entitled, Wall Carpet Piece.*

*M. January 2014*

Perhaps Koolen, under the influence of some driving force, saw the black and white triangles under tension needing to escape from the leather stool, and she released them to an anterior state of unassembled shapes.<sup>2</sup> Or that upon considering the kimono, and all that it represents for us westerners, that it had to exist as an element of presentation and constriction, hence its destiny not being that of private display, but rather exposed and seen, bound up for the public, as we've always secretly dreamed to see. In *Going Public*, Boris Groys mentions a particular force, one of uncontrollable urge when referring to the artist as a human embodiment of a natural force. Maybe that force finds its existence outside and independent of anyone: A force that possesses and propels the artist to become a serving servant to the master.<sup>3</sup> A servant artist whose driving task and will is to succumb to, not rule over, the materials before him or her; the master being the future subject in front of the artist, ready to be made.

*This season, fringe, and the color red are totally in. We wanted to do something completely new so we asked if she would work with us. She said she liked us, saw some future form potential and could understand why we were tired of the flat and oven-wrapped. We said to her, 'Give us blepharoplasty<sup>4</sup> and hot style Kim Jong-Un's shifted mullet.' She just sat there and stared at us intently, eyes squinted. Suddenly, she uttered, 'whatever', then flicked her cigarette and grabbed us. Her sweaty hands roughly fingered our stiff bodies. She was mumbling to herself, hastily grabbing and throwing tools. It all happened so fast. Though a bit more painful than we thought it would be, and only one of us got a flattop mullet, the reconstruction was totally worth it.*

*B.P. & G. March 2014*

Sitting like islands, the anecdotes are among several other islets, recounting yet another instance whereby an object, material or gift has undergone some serious plastic surgery by the sometimes doctor imposter Rachel Koolen. But perhaps it is more apt to say that serious wreckage is executed upon that which needs release, followed by reconstructive surgery. Based on the anecdotes, one might too easily jump to the conclusion of a Koolen bent affinity towards destruction, which is only a half-truth, or even half of the truth. There is definitely destruction and urge, but there is also a hormone: An internal, compulsive other force driving her, to serve and assist the subject in its demands. And it is a reforming pleasure to see anterior meaning of material and code liberated when tension is released.

*She lived across from me and I would often see her staring at me from behind her grimy window each time I beat the floor carpets out on the balcony. I always smiled and waved at her, and in her own way of waving back, her hand would make nervous movements, as if hesitating to acknowledge me. These awkward encounters went on for about three years. One day, I bought a new carpet beater at the market and put the old one out with the garbage, as people often do. Not too long after, while out on the rear balcony I saw her again, but she didn't see me, at least I don't think she did. She was taking photos of herself and she had in her hand what looked like the carpet beater I had put out. With object in hand she played with it in an odd manner. In one moment she posed with the beater as a mask, placed in front of her face, like that of a knight. But then I felt uncomfortable watching her as she did other more peculiar acts with it, like spanking herself, so I pretended to be inspecting my plants. I wondered if she intended the spanking as cleaning, like beating the dirt out of her. And reed carpet beaters aren't exactly soft, I mean sometimes I use mine on the derrières of my children. It's still so weird for me, I mean now I know she wasn't so interested in befriending me, it was the beater that she was so intent on. But I can't stop questioning if she intended that I should see her, or even should watch her, as she used to watch me.*

*T. april 2014*

Text by Rachel A. Carey

1) [U](#): Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, 1922, p.7

2) [Y](#): Freud further explores in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, 'the compulsion of destiny' and the urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things, p.308. This was a precursor to his research and later writings on the death drive principle.

3) [G](#): Boris Groys, Going Public, pp.9-21

4) [±](#): Blepharoplasty is a plastic surgery operation for, among other things, aesthetically modifying the eye region of the face.

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