

“The unconscious is not the preserve of wild drives that have to be tamed by the ego, but the site where a dramatic truth speaks out.” – Slavoj Žižek, 2006

The relationship between culture, power and identity is negotiated through the materiality of the body. Understood this way, the body can be seen as a social relation wherein elements of agency and culture are continuously in flux. In Simone De Beauvoir’s words: “The body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and our sketch of our project.”

Anya Hasset’s ‘Not Yours, Mine’ is mixed-media and discursive expression of the *body-as-a-situation*; that is, as a site of self-expression as well as a repository of social oppression. Hasset’s work articulates a personal narrative of the body as it internalises physical violence while retaining the emotionality of its corporal functioning.

Among other things, Hasset’s paintings, illustrations, sculptures and video work underscore a disintegration of the self: Moments whereby a loss of control overwhelms the subject, culminating in a crisis of identity and an absence of certainty in reference to the body—both as a physical reality and as a socioemotional process.

Experientially, there is so much chaos, turbulence, and turmoil in this disintegration, which is elaborated brilliantly in the crude and luminous expressionism of the bulbous, amorphous shapes of the female form that run throughout Hasset’s work.

Fluidity is a concept inwrought into the corporality of this reoccurring motif; the experience of not being solid, of being indeterminate and malleable, explored within an unsettled context of coercion, madness and emotion. The constant use of a deep hue of Prussian blue also draws on this experience of fluidity, symbolising the arbitrariness of water and its relationship to the life process.

Speculatively, the colour blue in Hasset’s work has a Janus-faced meaning for the artist. In one instance, there is an impression of the subject being so overwhelmed by an unwanted experience that she feels like she is drowning under water. Conversely, in another instance, the calmness and clarity of the blue suggests something about the freedom and the peace potentially entailed in submitting to that unwanted experience. Interestingly, poetry can be seen on the main canvas of the exhibition, perhaps serving as apothegms of survival while navigating through a psychology of tempestuous waters.

Unsettled duality works throughout Hasset’s exhibition. The forms and colours in her works, while gentle and almost innocent, detail a general landscape of the psychological terrorism inflicted upon the female body. Counterintuitively, this struggle between the imagery and the meaning suggests a symbiosis—not a contradiction. Indeed, all within the same space-time matrix: The impression of the aesthetics changes the reality of the violence, while the reality of violence changes the impression of the aesthetics.

A dialogue therefore exists between these two aspects of Hasset’s work, traversing the uncomfortable boundaries between the mind and the body, the self and the other, and the private and the social. *Prima facie*, there is no resolution to this dialectic of opposites; it is ongoing process of finding a semblance of an identity in an emergent field of ontological insecurity and existential anxiety.

On an abstract level, a calmness and sensuality radiates Hassett's aesthetic; something soft, playful and tender animates the forms, the colours, and the movements of her works. On a symbolic level, however, something altogether different is going on, namely: an intensely physical violation of the intimacies of the self.

These dichotomies indicate the degree to which traumatising leads not so much to a complete dissolution of the self, but more to a continual disorganisation of the constitutive parts of self. Indeed, throughout the exhibition, various body parts are abstracted as objects-in-themselves. Hands, limbs, breasts and torsos are fleshed-out and imbued with a life-force of their own, connoting something about the way in which one's own neurology re-engages with a body it has hitherto felt estranged from. And there something hopeful about this: That the self is still in the process of actualising itself—even after its integrity has been brutalised, even after its soul has been violated, there is something still left of the self to work with and build anew.

In the last instance, amidst this web of dichotomies, it is important to recognise the existence of at least one absolute certainty within Hassett's work: That inside the female body a woman experiences a range of different feelings that have nothing to do with being sexual. In the 'Whole Woman', Germaine Greer once articulated that:

"A woman's body is the battlefield where she fights for liberation. It is through her body that oppression works, reifying her, sexualising her, victimising her, disabling her."

Presenting the female body as something asexual, while emotional, tender, fleshy, and physically responsive to a nature altogether different from the norms of hyper-masculine sexuality, is an act of self-affirmation; it is a *situation* where the personal and the political meet and converse on feminist-emanipatory terms. Viewed this way, the female body in Hassett's work is a response to, and a critique of, the patriarchal violence that inflicts so much pain upon the surfaces and souls of women's bodies everywhere. Perhaps this is why Hassett's work is both personal and accessible, because it is particular to her experience while signifying something universal: a woman's need for self-assertion.

