

HUW DAVIES GALLERY 23 April–10 May 2009

Dumb-founded

Kathleen Fisher

Kathleen Fisher's mannequins are no dummies. Without her intervention they might classify as dummies, but Fisher won't allow her mannequins the luxury of gentle repose between gigs or the silent, sad, inevitable dismemberment and crumbling that comes with retirement.

The suggestive possibilities of mannequins—human replicas, mostly female and life size—have interested artists over many years. They appealed to the Dadaists and Surrealists, including Dali in paintings and installations and, in photography, Man Ray. Mannequins placed in fantastic settings referenced aspects of the human condition. Often with banal titles (Man Ray's *Mannequin with a moustache and wire over her head*, for example) many expressed the artists' fashionably nihilist views on art and life.

Kathleen Fisher's images have evocative titles. There's no shying away from the point of the image in her work, clever and witty anthropomorphic word play carrying a strong message about the use of the female image for commercial gain. As she says in the statement accompanying this exhibition (Fisher is a writer as well as a photographer; see www.tinypurplefishphotography.blogspot.com):

You've probably noticed that most mannequins are female; in fact, this exhibition contains just one male, a young boy who looks like he's in training to live in a Florida condo. In contrast, the females—whether ice-cold, overtly sexual, eerie or clownish—all exude a sense of tragedy or dissatisfaction. The result is a theme of femininity that is exaggerated and fake, perhaps reflecting the lifestyles these mannequins were originally manufactured to sell.

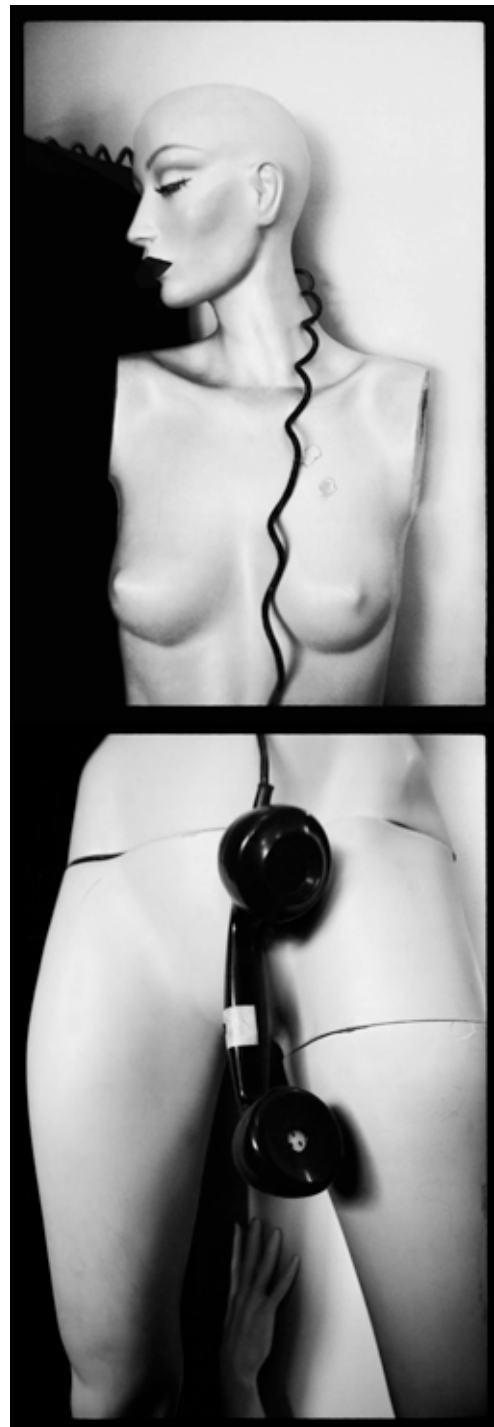
Mannequins interest contemporary artists worldwide. In May 2008 ABC News reported that

A mannequin perched on the toilet is vying with a cartoon cat to land the Turner Prize—the controversial British award that annually sparks a heated debate about the definition of art ... Not a single painter made this year's short-list, which is dominated by filmmakers and video artists. ... Cathy Wilkes displays shop mannequins squatting on the toilet and sitting with leftover bits of dried porridge at their feet.

It was the cartoon cat that took out the Turner. But, further illustrating the blurring of boundaries associated with mannequins and similar depictions of humans, *The Guardian* newspaper reported that '... the most controversial thing about this year's prize was its lack of controversy ... The most that could be mustered was half-hearted tut-tutting over an exhibit featuring a naked mannequin on the toilet.'

Kathleen Fisher has made quirky and sometimes provocative contributions to group exhibitions at PhotoAccess over a number of years. We are very pleased to present the clever and rather eerie *Dumb-founded*, her first solo exhibition with us, in the HUW DAVIES GALLERY at the Manuka Arts Centre.

David Chalker



Call Me

Artist statement

Dumb-founded explores the fate of clothing mannequins after they have expired their fashion used-by dates.

Since the rise of department stores in the second half of the nineteenth-century, mannequins have been essential to clothing retail, acting as 'silent salespeople' to subliminally communicate ideals of beauty. For instance, female mannequins are normally tall and thin, with pouted lips, doe eyes and dainty noses. And their male counterparts boast six-pack stomachs and cowboy-slim hips.

Having said this, the specifics of beauty do change with time and, as such, mannequin design alters to match. For example, in 1885 female mannequins had ample busts, in 1948 they had 'child-bearing' hips, in the 1970s they grew nipples and in the new millennium became racially diverse.

So what happens when ideals change and old mannequins are replaced? The lucky ones are overhauled or snapped up by collectors. Others are demoted to junk stores or displays in small-town museums. And the utterly wretched are discarded, a jumble of limbs in storage rooms or rubbish bins.

In all of these contexts, their role is revised—instead of telling stories about fashion they act out new scenarios, ones with entirely new meanings. For example, what does it say when a female mannequin with luscious lashes and coral lipstick is dressed as a fighter pilot in a World War Two exhibit? When a telephone receiver is slung at crotch-level between another's legs? Or when a third is cut in half, her legs displayed above her head?

As the title suggests, *Dumb-founded* is a documentary record of used and vintage mannequins I've stumbled across, mostly in museums and second-hand stores. Outside their original context, these figures often look unruly, ironic, amusing or subversive. My photographic style, which is overtly subjective, has exaggerated this—each mannequin has been stamped with a strong interpretation, which creates a distinct personality or story.

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Kathleen Fisher
April 2009



The Nurses Mug Shots



The Stunned Mother

Biography

Kathleen Fisher was born in a town she never lived in, a small community in Western Australia's wheat belt. This may explain her fascination with both notions of home and rural life. She is also attracted to religion—notably Christianity, with its stories, icons and architecture—and history, including the ravages time has on buildings and human emotions.



The Laughing Girls

Kathleen sees photography as a way of 'making' images, rather than capturing 'reality'. As such, she enjoys experimenting with plastic cameras, photomontage, mixed media and using a scanner as a substitute camera. She is drawn to techniques that foreground the photographic process, such as altered photographs, overlapped images and visible sprocket holes.

An analytical person, Kathleen's work is usually narrative. She enjoys using juxtaposition, irony and humour to reveal her distinct interpretations. At the same time, she embraces accidents and co-incidents, which so often make the best images.

Kathleen has a Bachelor of Arts (English) (Honours) from Curtin University of Technology and a Graduate Certificate of Communications (Photomedia) from Edith Cowan University. She taught media and communications at Edith Cowan University for two years, and became a full-time photographic artist in 2006.

Exhibitions

Solo exhibitions

- 2009 *Dumb-founded*, HUW DAVIES GALLERY, PhotoAccess, Canberra
- 2004 *Moments in Wine*, Arte Café and Gallery, Bungendore

Group exhibitions

- 2008 *deLiver*, Art At The Heart 2008: Regional Arts Australia National Conference , Alice Springs
- HIY2008*, HUW DAVIES GALLERY, PhotoAccess, Canberra
- Body Moves*, New Works Art Gallery, Canberra
- 2007 *Recycled Materials in Art*, The Artists Shed, Queanbeyan
- Wasteland*, Tuggeranong Arts Centre, Canberra
- 2006 *Wasteland*, Belconnen Gallery, Canberra
- Red Lens*, Charles Sturt University, Dubbo
- Canberra Photographic Society 60th Anniversary Exhibition*, Canberra Museum and Gallery
- Wildside: What's going on on the hilltops of Canberra?*, HUW DAVIES GALLERY, PhotoAccess
- 2005 *Fresh*, Strathnairn Homestead Gallery, Canberra
- 2004 *Pictures on Walls*, Strathnairn Homestead Gallery, Canberra
- 2003 *The Amazing Picture Machine*, Tuggeranong arts Centre, Canberra

List of works

Colour inkjet prints using UltraChrome HDR inks on Canson Infinity Rag Photographique, editions of 5

		mm	\$
1	<i>Playing Double</i>	492 x 498	245
2	<i>Milk Moustache</i>	179 x 135	85
3	<i>Tortoise Neck</i>	179 x 135	85
4	<i>The Veiled Bride</i>	179 x 135	85
5	<i>Orange Blossom Bride</i>	135 x 180	85
6	<i>Blinded by the Light</i>	135 x 180	85
7	<i>Tea Time</i>	492 x 505	245
8	<i>The Haunted Bride</i>	180 x 135	85
9	<i>The Stunned Mother</i>	135 x 180	85
10	<i>Wicker Baby</i>	135 x 180	85
11	<i>Golden-Haired Girl</i>	180 x 135	85
12	<i>The Laughing Girls</i>	510 x 1192	510
13	<i>Arm by her Side</i>	290 x 445	210
14	<i>She Kept Her Feet Up</i>	302 x 228	160
15	<i>Lovely Legs</i>	229 x 305	160
16	<i>Two-and-a-Half Sisters</i>	232 x 355	160
17	<i>Hand Out</i>	436 x 289	220
18	<i>Call Me</i>	1195 x 406	510
19	<i>Top of the Class</i>	406 x 190	160
20	<i>The Nurse's Mug Shots</i>	234 x 355	160
21	<i>Poor Little Rich Girl</i>	180 x 135	85
22	<i>Junior Player</i>	180 x 135	85
23	<i>Miss Power Wheels</i>	180 x 135	85
24	<i>On the Shelf</i>	180 x 135	85
25	<i>She Was a Fighter Pilot</i>	180 x 135	85
26	<i>Chandelier Girl</i>	180 x 135	85
27	<i>Entombed</i>	292 x 443	210

Numbers 2–6, 8–11 and 21–26 available as a single sheets

HUW DAVIES GALLERY @ PhotoAccess

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