BODY IN TRANSITION: CUT THIS FAT OFF OF ME! RESEARCH ON THE VISUAL HISTORY OF THE BODY IMAGE AND AN ATTEMPT TO DECONSTRUCT THE HATRED IN SOCIETY TOWARDS FAT

by

PELİN GÜRE

Submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Sabancı University
Summer 2010

BODY IN TRANSITION: CUT THIS FAT OFF OF ME!
RESEARCH ON THE VISUAL HISTORY OF THE
BODY IMAGE AND AN ATTEMPT TO DECONSTRUCT
THE HATRED IN SOCIETY TOWARDS FAT

APPROVED BY:

Assoc. Prof. Lanfranco Aceti …….

(Dissertation Supervisor)

Selçuk Artut …….

Assoc. Prof. Wieslaw Zaremba ...…….

DATE OF APPROVAL: …….

ABSTRACT

Body in Transition: Cut This Fat off of Me!

Research on the Visual History of the

Body Image and an Attempt to Deconstruct

the Hatred in Society Towards Fat

Pelin Güre

M.A., Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design

Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Lanfranco Aceti

Summer 2010

This study aims to investigate the issues of fat and obesity and analyze how one perceives his/her body image and how corpulence is perceived in the society. It discusses the changes on the representations of the body and how these changes reflect/affect different socially constructed body perceptions by looking at different images of the body from pre-historic times to modernity.

Since my interest to research in such an area is based on my long term problematic relationship with obesity, the study first focuses on how do fat people understand and conceptualize their corporeal experiences. Traditional studies approach the issue of fat using either pathological discourses, which treat fatness as a disease, or psychosomatic discourses, which treat fatness as a symptom of a psychological disorder by recognizing corpulence as a medical or social problem. Psychoanalytic theory proves that perception is significant in the formation of the ego and one's relation to his/her own body. In order to analyze the significant role of perception in defining the body, beauty ideals of different eras in the history of Western visual arts are presented in the study. Consecutive studies on beauty ideals favors that bodies are politically, culturally, and economically constructed. Starting with the late 1960's, the efforts to liberate the representations of the body image from traditional bounds multiply as feminist artists' involvement on the issues of the female body increase. Feminist theories are explained in order to serve as the basis of my artistic production presented in the last chapter of the study.

Six artworks I produced along with my thesis research are discussed and exhibited under the name *Cut this fat off of me!* on August 4th, 2010 at Sabancı University. *Cut this fat off of me!* deals with fat concerns from a second-generation feminist perspective based on deconstruction of the social norms regarding the body.

Keywords: Fat, Perception, Corporeal Existence, Body Ideal, Feminist Theory, Canan Şenol.

ÖZET

Dönüşen Vücutlar: Beni Bu Yağlardan Kurtarın!

Vücut Şeklinin Görsel Tarihi Üzerine Araştırma ve

Toplumda Şişmanlığa Karşı Duyulan Nefreti Yımak için Bir Girişim

Pelin Güre
Y.L., Görsel Sanatlar ve Görsel İletişim Tasarımı

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Lanfranco Aceti

Güz 2010

Bu çalışma, şişmanlık ve obeziteyi, bu sorunları deneyimleyen insanların kendi vucütlarının görünüşlerini nasıl algıladıkları ve toplumda şişmanlığın nasıl algılandığı üzerinden araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tarih öncesi zamanlardan moderniteye kadar vücut şeklinin farklı görsel sunumlarının örneklerine dayanarak, tarih boyunca görsel sunumlardaki farklılıkların sosyal olarak yapılandırılmış vücut formu algısını nasıl etkilediği tartışılmaktadır.

Böyle bir alanda çalışma yapma isteğim obeziteyle olan ve uzun yıllar süren kendi problemli ilişkime dayandığı için, çalışma öncelikle şişman insanların kendi vücutlarına dair deneyimlerini nasıl anlamlandırdıklarına ve kavramsallaştırdıklarına yoğunlaşmaktadır. Geleneksel çalışmalar şişmanlık konusuna ya patolojik söylemlerle yaklaşmaktadır, ki bunlar şişmanlığı bir hastalık olarak tanımlar, ya da psikosomatik söylemler kullanmaktadır, ki bunlar da şişmanlığı sosyal veya tıbbi bir problemin psikolojik semptomu olarak tanımlar. Psikoanalitik teori kanıtlar ki, algı egonun oluşturulmasında ve kişinin kendi vücuduyla ilişkisinde çok önemlidir. Vücudu tanımlarken algının rolünün önemini araştırabilmek için Batı görsel sanatlarının değişik dönemlerindeki güzellik idolleri çalışma içinde sunulmaktadır. Güzellik idolleri üzerine birbirini takip eden çeşitli çalışmalar, vücudun politik, kültürel ve ekonomik olarak şekillendirildiğini savunur. 1960'ların sonlarına doğru ortaya çıkan, vucüt imgesini geleneksel algı sınırlarının dışına çıkarmayı hedefleyen feminist hareketler özellikle feminist sanatçıların da kadın vücuduna dair çalışmaya başlamalarıyla hızlanır. Tezin son bölümünde açıklanan kendi sanatsal üretimime temel oluşturması açısından bu feminist teoriler güzellik idolleri tarihi üzerine yapılan araştırmayı takip edecek şekilde sunulmuştur.

4 Ağustos 2010 tarihinde Sabancı üniversitesinde sergilenmeye başlayan *Beni Bu Yağlardan Kurtarın!* isimli sergimdeki altı farklı işi, tez süreci boyunca yaptığım araştırmalar sonunda ürettim. Tezimin son bölümünde irdelediğim *Beni Bu Yağlardan Kurtarın!* şişmanlığa dair endişeleri vurgularken, ikinci jenerasyon feminist teorilerin eleştirel bakış açısından faydalanarak ideal vücutlara dair sosyal normları yıkmak adına bir girişimdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şişmanlık, Algı, Vücutsal Varoluş, İdeal Vücut, Feminist Teori, Canan Şenol.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I offer my sincerest gratitude to my family. They have supported me throughout my thesis process with their patience and extensive knowledge. They have always been a source of inspiration for me not only with their medical expertise, but also their creative and critical mind that encouraged me to understand the human condition that shapes art and its perception.

I am grateful to Dr. Lanfranco Aceti for his positive attitude, warmth and support as my supervisor, and his intellectual contributions in the early stages of this thesis. I am also grateful to Wieslaw Zaremba and Selçuk Artut for their critical insights and support that helped me to improve this thesis further.

I am indebted to my dear friends Simona Zemaityte, Alp Tuğan, and Özgür Atlagan for always supporting me in every possible way and their invaluable friendship. I am also grateful to Elif Gül Tirben for her supportive critiques and Merve Cansız, Yiğit Yüksel and Onur Gökmen for helping me with my thesis exhibition preparations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

The body is a highly contested site, its flesh is both the recipient and source of desire, lust and hatred. As a pawn of technology, the body is sacred and sacrificial, bearing the politics of society and state. The body is our common bond, yet it separates us in its public display of identity, race and gender. Fat is one of the most visible outcomes of psychological or social restlessness. This is why the topic on the concept of body and fat have been discussed and analyzed on various grounds especially after the number of obese people in the United States started to increase uncontrollably. The problems fat would bring into a person's life may well be caused by medical reasons, but the problems that produce the corpulence I refer to in this study focus on the uneasiness of the vast majority of fat people who are compulsive eaters. Despite the diverse discourses on fat, I have come to realize, when they feel free enough to express their discomfort, the individual experiences of fat people seldom differ.

My interest in researching this area is rooted in my own relationship with fat. I have been fat since I was a child. I became obese when I was eighteen. I spent ten years eating compulsively, until my weight reached three digit numbers, and another 10 years to reverse that increase. Although it is easy for me to express my feelings about my fat experience, as I no longer consider myself fat, still, I do not fit social norms of the society. The process has been traumatic, both mentally and physically.

It is because of this personal experience that my research has autobiographical characteristics. Excluding the first two chapters – the first grounded in psychoanalytic, and the second in feminist theory in the visual arts – I communicate

my arguments in a first-person voice, which is identified as the most significant characteristic of autobiographical research papers. I prefer to use this style in my paper – first, because my thesis aims to make clear the conceptual framework of the artworks presented in the last chapter following the theoretical analysis. Secondly, my artworks flourished from my own struggle with fat. As can be seen in several autobiographical examples in feminist art, gaining consciousness of one's own body is pivotal in retaining a critical position on matters of female body.

I would first like to approach the topic from a psychoanalytic perspective in accordance with the progress of my own experience, which is not much different from many other obese people. Fat people are seen simply as fat people. Like any other type of discrimination, fat depersonalizes. It is necessary at this point for me to briefly go through my personal history of dealing with fat, which serves as a case study for the rest of the analysis as well as a basis for the artistic production explained in the last chapter.

The first ten years of my fat history, when I was constantly putting on weight, were passed looking for medical solutions to my problem. I visited many doctors, had my hormone levels checked on a regular basis, and used all kinds of pills to decrease the fat absorption of my body. I even went to the only fat camp in Turkey. Finally, went through surgery: a silicon balloon was inserted into my stomach, filling three quarters of it, so that I would be physically unable to eat more than was physiologically necessary. Whatever I did, it turned out to be useless. My body was perfectly healthy, the dietitians were either unable to help me lose weight or were able to help only for very short periods, after which, I regained twice the amount I had lost. Both my parents were doctors. None of the medical help offered could cure my compulsive eating. As I accepted the problem I was supposed to have, the weight problem grew bigger.

When I left home for college, I started losing weight at a very slow pace and from then-on never really put on significant amounts of weight. Leaving home made me realize how much emotional pressure I had been under – to be perfect for the ones I love: the excess weight I carried was a sign of that pressure, increasing every day I was exposed to the sadness my condition caused them.

I decided to see a psychiatrist. I no longer wanted to pretend that I was content with my body and started searching for the books on the issue. It was to my surprise

that there was a great amount of literature, especially about women. It was the first time I felt relief, that I realized I was not the only one dealing with this problem, even I had been to places where fat people were the only residents such as Dr. Muzaffer Kuşhan's fat camp. I found in those places that fat was an even bigger taboo: people were there in order to hand control of their bodies over to wiser authorities, instead of trying to comprehend the reasons and find the solutions of this readily apparent and visually present problem. As is the case with surgical operations like liposuction, the image of a healthy life sold by these camps was yet another way of avoiding the problem. That is why I was even more surprised when I read how other women expressed their feelings – how similar they were to me in their discomfort. Fat is a taboo in the urban society I come from, just as it is in any other. For this reason, expressing his/her feelings for a fat person is beyond frightening.

After getting my reading of feminist theories of the body, I realized that I was naively egoistic in thinking that the world was spinning around me—around my fat — and in the beginning I was too scared to accept otherwise. My fat became an excuse for the actions that I was afraid to take and I was able to blame my physical appearance for any kind of failure I was experiencing whether or not related to my condition. In other words, my problem with my body, my appearance, had a magnetism that could pull all my other problems into its territory, turning everything into one big complex problem that I was unable to take under control. That is one of the reasons why I was never able to articulate what I truly felt about myself: my fat became a cover for all my fears and anxieties. I would like to quote a list of what fat means from Susie Orbach's book *Fat is a Feminist Issue.* This was my first encounter with a hidden society of fat women, who shared the same feelings I was experiencing and were bravely articulating them. There is not one line on this list that has not crossed my mind while dealing with my fat.

> To be fat means to compare yourself to every other woman, looking for the ones whose own fat can make you relax.
>
> To be fat means to be outgoing and jovial to make up for what you think are your deficiencies.
>
> To be fat means to refuse invitations to go to the beach or dancing.
>
> To be fat means to be excluded from contemporary mass culture, from fashion, sports and the outdoor life.
>
> To be fat is to be a constant embarrassment to yourself and your friends.
>
> To be fat is to worry every time a camera is in view.

To be fat means to feel ashamed for existing.

To be fat means having to wait until you are thin to live.

To be fat means to have no needs.

To be fat means to be constantly trying to lose weight.

To be fat means to take care of other's needs.

To be fat means never saying “no”.

To be fat means to have an excuse for failure.

To be fat means to wait for the man who will love you despite the fat – the man who will fight through the layers.[1]

As is clear in the list above, the worries I, and other women with the same problem, have carried for so long are mostly related to how a woman perceives her size through the eyes of the others. Being unable to meet the expectations of a society intolerant to any kind of imperfection locks people into the prison of the “self”, a consciousness aware of the imperfections it carries along with it. A US study, carried out by George L. Maddox, Kurt W. Back, and Veronica R. Liederman of Duke University, shows that fatness, as a characteristic of self or others, tends to provoke negative affect and rejection. The study, explained in the article *Overweight as Social Deviance and Disability* is, in short as follows: various samples, selected to include individuals most likely to be indifferent to normative preferences for leanness or tolerant to fatness, that is to say individuals with overweight issues as well as ones who have normal weight ratios according to body mass index, are shown to consider a fat child as less likable than children with recognized physical disabilities in a picture-ranking task. Fatness in self is also shown to be related to an elevated actual-ideal discrepancy among overweight individuals, and to a tendency to perceive oneself as not fat. Fat individuals are imputed to be responsible for their condition, a factor which intensifies the negative effect and affects interaction in both social and medical contexts:

> A major source of difficulty for the fat person is likely to be the discomfort in his relationships with his fellows rather than bodily discomfort or disease. The high probability of interpersonal pain and suffering is associated with the fact that Western culture on the whole, and contemporary American culture in particular, has ridiculed and despised fatness. Fatness tends, therefore, to have high social relevance, usually with negative connotations. Fat people are stigmatized. They are imputed to be responsible for their deviance. Moreover, there are

[1] Susie Orbach, *Fat Is a Feminist Issue: The Anti-Diet Guide for Women,* (New York: Galahad Books, 1997), 38-39.

> indications that, whatever physicians think about the prognosis of obesity theoretically, practically they perceive it to be incurable and only slightly improvable.[2]

Reasons for the negative connotations of fatness in this contemporary Western society is numerous. One is the persistent claim that obesity is a morbid condition which a responsible person concerned about his health should avoid. While this may be the case, hatred towards fatness is rooted in religious traditions and has a long long history before the emerge of obesity as a common disease. Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins of Catholic tradition. On the other hand, greediness is also condemned in Islam, one characteristics of which is a strong emphasis on impulse control (the word "nefis" in Turkish, used to express both lower-self, meaning the bodily appetites to be controlled, and something delicious). Fatness suggests a kind of immorality inviting punishment. Correspondingly, the reduction of excess weight and the avoidance of the contagion of gluttony imply self-denial to bring appropriate rewards, including good health. The moral orientation is in turn reinforced by aesthetic considerations.

From a feminist perspective, following the religious codes of a any society that relegates women to the social norms of wife and mother has several significant consequences that contribute to the problem of fat. First, in order to become a wife and mother, a woman has to have a man. Snaring him is presented as an almost unattainable – but essential – goal. To do that, a woman has to learn to regard herself as an item, a commodity, a sex object. Much of her experience and identity depends on how she perceives herself and how she is perceived by others. As John Berger observes in *Ways of Seeing*:

> Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women, but also the relation of women to themselves.[3]

This emphasis on presentation as the central aspect of a woman's existence makes her extremely self-conscious. It demands that she occupy herself with a self-image that others will find pleasing and attractive – an image that will immediately convey what kind of woman she is. She must observe and evaluate herself, scrutinizing every detail of herself as though she were an outside judge. She attempts to make herself in the image of womanhood presented by billboards, newspapers,

[2] George L. Maddox et al., "Overweight as Social Deviance and Disability," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 9 (1968): 289.

[3] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (United Kingdom: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008), 47.

magazines and television. The media present women either in a sexual context or within the family, reflecting a woman's two prescribed roles, first as a sex object, and then as a mother. A girl is brought up to marry by "catching" a man with her good looks and pleasing manner. To do this she must look appealing, sensual, sexual, virginal, innocent, reliable, daring, mysterious. And thin. She sets out her self-image in the marketplace of marriage. My mother, who was highly radical mother for her own time, fighting the social norms of her community, would say these things again and again. These are no longer the superimpositions of higher power structures such as the media and big corporations, they are perfectly functioning even within the smallest units of the society—families. Susan Bordo argues that compulsive eating concerns mother and daughter relationships directly:

> Traditional studies approach the issue of fat using pathological discourses, which treat fatness as a disease, or psychosomatic discourses, which treat fatness as a symptom of a psychological disorder. Whereas, the feminist perspective reveals that compulsive eating is, in fact, an expression of the complex relationships between mothers and daughters. It is a complex and ironic process, for women are prepared for this life of inequality by other women who themselves suffer its limitations – their mothers.[4]

It's obvious that growing-up is different for girls and boys; what may be less apparent is, that to prepare her daughter for a life of inequality, the mother tries to hold back her child's desires to be a powerful, autonomous, self-directed, energetic and productive human being. From an early age, the young girl is encouraged to accept this rupture in her development. She is guided to cope with the loss by putting her energy into taking care of others. Her needs for emotional support and growth will be satisfied if she can convert them into giving to others. Judith Butler puts it as "To be a woman is to live with the tension of giving and not getting."[5]

As the daughter develops from child to woman, the act of feeding herself may become a symbolic response, both to the physical and emotional deprivation she suffered as a child – an expression of her fraught intimacy with her mother. As the child gets more adept, she begins to feed herself and select her own foods, producing a developing sense of independence of the mother. But this break causes conflict for

---

[4] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 22.

[5] Judith Butler, "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault," in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, (New York: Longman, 1998), 619.

the daughter. On the one hand, the daughter wants to move away, learn to take care of herself. On the other hand, this ability to nurture herself implies a rejection of the mother. Elizabeth Grosz points out a deep significance that this rejection takes on because of the social limitation of the woman's role in patriarchal society. If the mother is not needed as a mother, who will she be? And so the daughter feels guilt for destroying her mother's only role. As she seeks emotional sustenance through other social relationships, the adult daughter may continue to suffer deprivation. Very often her own partner has not learned to give. In search for love, comfort, warmth and support, she turns to eating for that indefinable something that never seems to be there. Compulsive eating becomes a way of expressing both sides of this conflict: In overfeeding herself, the daughter may be trying to reject her mother's role – reproaching her for her inadequacies in nurturing; or else she may be attempting to retain a sense of identity with her mother.[6]

For the compulsive eater, fat has a symbolic meaning which makes sense within a feminist context. Fat is a response to the many oppressive manifestations of a sexist culture. Fat is a way of saying "no" to powerlessness and self-denial, to a limited range of acceptable sexual expression, which demands that females look and act in a certain way, and to an image of womanhood defining of a specifically prescribed social role. "Fat offends western ideals of female beauty and, as such, every overweight woman creates a crack in the popular culture's ability to make women mere products."[7], says Barbara Winstead, but while fat serves as a symbolic rejection of the way society distorts women and their relationships with others, particularly in the critical relationship between mothers and daughters, becoming fat remains an unhappy and unsatisfactory attempt to resolve these conflicts. And whether a woman is trying to conform to social expectations or attempting to forge a different identity, it is a painful price to pay.

In this context, the first chapter of this study constructs a theoretical framework of fat as it is experienced by the fat person, together with how it is perceived by others. The chapter opens with an analysis on the boundaries of bodily existence. The discussion then traces psychoanalytic arguments about the importance of perception in the formation of the ego. Definitions of corpulence and how a person

6 Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 110-14.

7 Barbara A. Winstead, "Body Image, Physical Attractiveness, and Depression," in *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 53 (Feb 1985): 89.

redefines himself/herself according to those definitions bring the analysis to the closing section on theoretical background: the visible problems of self that occur as a result of different understandings of corpulence – eating disorders.

The second chapter presents different ages of body ideals in the fine arts. The human figure is one of the oldest and most significant motifs in the art of most cultures. In the west, the vast majority of sculptures were figurative forms until twentieth century modernism. Although the visual definitions of the body have changed significantly through the centuries, the body still preserves its significant hold over the representative arts. Every culture constructs images of attractiveness; certain body types are presented as the ideal objects of desire and dominate all areas of visual culture while, other body types are characterized as undesirable. Dale Cusumano and Kevin Thompson argue that "Although contemporary western culture today make a fetish of the slim female body, in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe, an ample body was most admired as evidence of a person's wealth and power, and voluptuous women were more commonly represented."[8] The first part of the second chapter explores the ideals of beauty presented in the fine arts until the twentieth century.

When photography became common, especially in advertising after the WWII, body ideals changed drastically and manipulated women to fit into norms that are too perfect to be natural. Art that focused directly on issues of the body as a theme surfaced dramatically in the late 1960's and 1970's by women artists that were inspired by the activism of political movement for women's rights.[9] In the 1980's, feminists continued to engage with politicized issues pertaining directly to the body. Artists like Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman deconstructed the ideological meanings of objectified and stereotyped representations of the body from the past and present. "Your body is a battleground," proclaims a text in a 1989 artwork by Barbara Kruger, referring to the conventions regarding the most socially preferred size, shape, color of bodies, and taboos against specific forms of sexual expression. Feminist critiques on the body that were highly debated in 1970's and 80's West follow the chronological analysis of body image. Male gaze became a crucial point in order to understand the deficiencies of the body-politics. The chapter closes

[8] Dale L. Cusumano and J. Kevin Thompson, "Body Image and Body Shape Ideals in Magazines: Exposure, Awareness, and Internalization," *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 37 (1997), 702.

[9] Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 69, No. 3 (1987), 326.

concluding that woman artists play a significant role in challenging the existing definitions of beauty and creating awareness in society on body issues. Considering fat bodies, a solution is offered in the realm of feminism that a shift in social norms concerning bodies might reduce the invisible burden on women enabling them to experience their bodies freely in their natural sizes.

The third and last chapter presents the artworks that I produced on the issues of fat. As a person who experienced obesity, I offer a two-sided conceptual framework of my artworks on fatness following the pattern of my thesis. In my graduation exhibition *Cut this fat off of me!*, first, I aim to express the ambivalent feelings women have towards their bodies in the context of fat related to the issues of perception and the self. Second, I try to deconstruct the imposition of slimness in the society by taking a second-generation feminist position that is explained in detail in the second chapter.

CHAPTER 1

Corporeal Existence and Corpulence

1.1 Corporeal Existence and Transactions

Corporeal means involving or relating to the physical world rather than the spiritual world. Corporeal existence, then, is the pure physical—bodily set of perceptions and experiences of being. When human existence is in consideration, it would not be wrong to say that the boundaries between physical and spiritual is not that pure anymore. As it is the main discussion in this analysis, body is a highly contested site. It is the subject of a continual change, therefore vulnerable to various manipulations of the changing social interactions. Since how one perceives his/her own corporeality does not solely depend on his/her physical encounters with non-changing body forms, his/her understanding of the physical self is open to adjustments of an evolving mind set.

In her book *Living Across and Through Skins*, Shannon Sullivan develops a pragmatist-feminist account of corporeal existence that hinges on her thorough explication of the Deweyan notion of "transaction." In her introduction, Sullivan situates her own thinking in a rich context of pragmatism and feminism as well as genealogical and phenomenological philosophy, emphasizing along the way the importance of the "cross-fertilization"[10] of these fields to her theoretical approach. By unpacking Dewey's use of the term "transaction," Sullivan is able to show how "bodies" are continuously "undergoing reconstitution through their constitutive

[10] Shannon Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*: *Transactional Bodies*, *Pragmatism and Feminism*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 7.

relations with others."[11] Thus, bodies are not neatly enclosed in their skins, but rather live *across* and *through* them. Identity becomes not a result of isolated existence but a function of certain stable transactions between a dynamic body and its often-precarious environment. Sullivan here employs a trio of culinary metaphors to further clarify her point. Transaction is not like a "melting pot" in which distinct ingredients sacrifice themselves in service of a "distinction-erasing" whole.[12] Nor is transaction accurately represented by a "tossed salad" in which different ingredients are "merely juxtaposed".[13] Rather, transaction is like a "stew pot" in which various ingredients actively "intermingle" and help constitute each other.[14]

That human bodies are continuously intermingling in this way suggests, for Sullivan, that the verbal noun "bodying" might be the best term for the human body in transaction.[15] Moreover, bodying does not occur arbitrarily, but rather follows certain patterns, or "habits."[16] These habits are not private constructions of individual organisms, nor are they rigid products of a fixed social/environmental order, but instead emerge out of the moving transactions of an organism with its environment. And it is here in this transacting interplay of organism and environment that the possibility of meaningful change in the world arises.

Sullivan then moves from this extended explication of transactional bodies to discuss the implications of such an account for particular issues in contemporary philosophy by taking up the work of Judith Butler and Susan Wendell, in order to explore how a transactional understanding of bodies assists in explanations of the body's "discursivity" and "materiality," and how this view helps to create the possibility of concrete resistance to cultural norms. Most importantly, she revises Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of corporeal existence, replacing his notion of "projective intentionality" with "hypothetical construction". The former, according to Sullivan, relies too heavily on an "atomistic" and "solipsistic" framework, which the latter avoids by taking seriously the "mutual constitution of meaning"[17] that occurs in "transactional bodily communication."[18]

The basis of Sullivan's opposition to Merleau-Ponty's notion of "projective

[11] Ibid., 13.
[12] Ibid., 14-15.
[13] Ibid., 15.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 30.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 79.
[18] Ibid., 82.

intentionality" lies in the different definitions of them for the "anonymous body". Sullivan argues that according to Merleau-Ponty, the body is able to be the backdrop that ensures communication because of anonymity. He claims that just "as the parts of my body together (comprise) a system, so my body and the other's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon , and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously."[19] She opposes him on the ground that anonymous existence is not the only level of human existence that is prepersonal. There is a personal level of bodily existence in which one can distinguish her body from the others, but beneath that personal level is a level of existence in which there is a commonality between and a quasi-indifferentiation from other bodies.[20] The wholeness that accompanies individuation, particularity, and distinctiveness is the link that provides the possibility of communication between one and other. She finally argues:

> Whether impersonal or prepersonal, Merleau-Ponty's anonymous body imposes a commonality upon different bodies and in doing so, impedes the communication and common ground between corporeal subjects that his account seeks to explain. The anonymity of the body reveals itself to be an assumption of a connection among bodies rather than an explanation of how community and connection might be achieved given the particular ways various people live their bodies. Only by rejecting Merleau-Pornty's concept of the anonymous body can feminists create a genuine option of breaking out of the ethically solipsistic subjectivity against which Merleau-Ponty tries to argue. Taking seriously the idea of others as different from oneself not only does not make community impossible, it is crucial to the possibility for communication with and understanding of another. [21]

In order to understand the underlying misconceptions that create reactions towards corpulence, it is crucial to take both Merleau-ponty's and Sullivan's arguments on corporeal existence into consideration. What this chapter tries to set out is a philosophical and psychoanalytical map of the underlying conceptions that lead to the obvious social reaction and fear towards fatness and present possible solutions on the level of theory, which will then form a ground for the visual analysis of the next chapter. To get more involved in perceiving bodies, next part presents an analysis on the formation of the ego and the untrustworthy importance of perception in the process, by going through Freud's and Lacan's theories on one's first

[19] Merleau-Ponty quoted in (Sullivan 2001, 69.)
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 75.

understanding of his/her body and the self. Their theories point out the truth in Merleau-Ponty's arguments that reside even in the first steps of a person to form an understanding of the self, as well as shedding light on the problematics of the process, which Sullivan reckons and offers solutions from a feminist perspective.

1.2 The Formation of the Ego and the Matter of Perception

Perception is the key element in the formation of the ego as Freud explains how ego is constructed based on the interactions of conscious and unconscious. According to him, what is conscious functions on the level of ego, which is the surface that is covering and controlling the id. 'Being conscious'[22] is in the first place a purely descriptive term, resting on perception of the most immediate and certain character. With the unconscious, he feels the need to make a distinction between what is yet there to become conscious—preconscious—,and the repressed, which is the true unconscious.[23] The distinction between them is made according to one's ability to put what he/she perceives into words. If an idea yet to be formed is on the stage of visuality or perceived through any other senses within the id, it is preconscious and when it is verbalized it will move to the level of conscious. On the other hand, unconscious is something that cannot be verbalized because it has been blocked or repressed somewhere throughout the process.

Foucault explains the importance of perception in physical life according to Freud's two different notions of the ego; narcissistic ego and ego as the mediator. In the former, the ego's origin is described in terms of the subject's ability to take itself or part of its own body as a love object. The development of the ego is not solely based on the subject's relationship to his/her body, but also the stimuli derived by the social interactions.[24] In that respect, perception becomes one of the key concepts that already exists in the breach between the mind and the body, being the psychical registration of the collision of external and internal stimuli on the body's sensory receptors. It is a term that requires a transgression of the duality of the mind/body

---

[22] Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. and trans. J. Strachey, et al., (London: Hogarth, 1955-74), 13.

[23] Ibid., 13-18.

[24] Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality,* trans. by Robert Hurley, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 51-54.

split. It shows the ineliminable dependence of the inside and the outside, mind and matter, on each other. Based on *The Ego and the Id*, Grosz interprets the ego as a mediator between two contradictory terms rather than the circulation of libidinal cathexes, the instinctual and corporeal strivings of the id on one hand and the demands and requirements of "reality" or "civilization"[25] for the modification, control, or postponement of instinctual satisfaction on the other. In other words, the narcissistic genesis of the ego entails that the subject cannot remain neutral or indifferent to its own body and body parts. The body is libidinally invested. The subject always maintains a relation of love or hate toward its own body because it must always maintain a certain level of psychical and libidinal investment. No person lives his or her own body merely as a functional instrument or a means to an end. Its value is never simply or solely functional, for it has a libidinal value in itself. The subject is capable of suicide, of anorexia, because the body is meaningful, has significance. Grosz quotes Foucault's explanation of anorexia:

> Anorexia, for example, is arguably the most stark and striking sexualization of biological instincts: the anorexic may risk her very life in the attainment of a body image approximating her ideal. Neither a "disorder" of the ego nor, as popular opinion has it, a "dieting disease" gone out of control, anorexia can, like the phantom limb, be a kind of mourning for a pre-Oedipal (i.e., precastrated) body and a corporeal connection to the mother that women in patriarchy are required to abandon. Anorexia is a form of protest at the social meaning of the female body. Rather than seeing it simply as an out-of-control compliance with the current patriarchal ideals of slenderness, it is precisely a renunciation of these "ideals."[26]

In other words, Freud would explain such an experience as a protest expressed not in verbal terms but rather visual or by action—an idea(l) that could not develop in the order of preconscious to conscious, but remained unconscious, that is to say, repressed by the collision of the social norms and the self, and found its way out of the id as a protest action rather than a verbal reaction. In her book *Sciences of the Flesh,* Dianne Sadoff explains different treatments that were used in psychoanalysis by Freud, one of them being rest-fattening-cure. The cure is simple; it requires rest in bed, isolation, feeding up and massage. Freud uses that specific cure for one of his patients named Emmy, a late nineteenth-century bourgeois wife. Emmy's domestic and marital responsibilities, intensified by the death of her husband during her

[25] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 28.

[26] Foucault quoted in (Grosz 1994, 40).

second confinement, had strained her capacity to perform them. Freud observed that Emmy managed a complex set of domestic economies and public interactions as well as had helped her entrepreneurial husband. Having withdrawn when ill into total isolation, Emmy nevertheless helped manage her husband's large business, supervise her children's educations, and correspond with prominent people in the intellectual world. Under Freud's care, Emmy lay quietly in bed, slept well but she relapsed after months of relative health and so Freud prescribed her a "feeding up" regimen. The rest-fattening-cure represented wasted women as demanding the authoritative intervention of a medical man who, invoking nature, rebirthed and reeducated her. His power infantilized the patient, who necessarily exhibited child-like acquiescence to her doctor's commands as her body ballooned.[27] This case study sets an example to how perception and acceptance through the other's eye can influence one's relationship to his/her body. Sadoff explains:

> A profoundly responsible and demanding position—by which I mean both job and social location—late-nineteenth-century bourgeois wifehood and maternity was situated at a point of historically specified stress that, in the new discourse of health and pathology, identified as ill the woman who failed to perform its functions perfectly. For the middle- or upper-middle-class female found herself constrained by contradictions and necessarily responding to conflicting cultural demands on both body and psyche. A less industrially developed society might merely have demanded that women be fat and fertile; a more aristocratic society might have removed mothering responsibilities from upper-class women, delegating the rearing of their children to nurses and tutors; and a less industrialized and business-centered society might have needed managers, but late-nineteenth-century culture overinscribed the demands on and overrefined the definition of wife- and motherhood. [28]

Since there is not enough literature on Turkish society and fatness, it is crucial here to note Sadoff's words importance in an emphasis shifting society on women's roles. Since the 1980's, the role of women especially in urban settings in Turkey is changing dramatically, but the family structure is changing slower than the economic structure of the cities. For the women who are lost in different representations of "the other" woman figure from their mothers to their colleagues, perceiving their own bodies through the other becomes even more complicated.

Lacan also explains in his idea of the "mirror stage" that the ego is not an outline or projection of the real anatomical and physiological body but is an

[27] Dianne F. Sadoff, *Sciences of the Flesh: Representing Body and Subject in Psychoanalysis*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 124-32.

[28] Ibid., 133.

imaginary outline or projection of the body, the body insofar as it is imagined and represented for the subject by the image of others (including its own reflection in a mirror). The ego is both a map of the body's surface and a reflection of the image of the other's body. The other's body provides the frame for the representation of one's own. In this sense, the ego is an image of the body's significance or meaning for the subject and for the other. It is thus as much a function of fantasy and desire as it is of sensation and perception; it is a taking over of sensation and perception by a phantasmal dimension. This significatory, cultural dimension implies that bodies, egos, subjectivities are not simply reflections of their cultural context and associated values but are constituted as such by them, marking bodies in their very "biological" configurations with socio-sexual inscriptions.[29]

Next part analyzes how these socio-sexual inscriptions appear physically in the biological configurations as excess weight. Corpulence is most commonly believed to result from eating too much. Medical theories that form the basis for this belief are presented in order to understand whether eating as a purely instinctual physical act is affected by exogenous factors or palatability can simply be the answer to accumulation of excess weight.

1.3 Corpulence

For many decades obesity has been a subject of major interest especially in countries with a high standard of living and readily available food supplies, and there is a voluminous literature on this condition that has accumulated in both the lay and medical press. Much work has been carried out on metabolism in the obese; there has been even more speculation, but the problem still remains a vexed one. Especially during the last few decades populations of modern affluent societies are warned by scientist, politicians, media and interest groups that there is an obesity epidemic. Being overweight is now not only culturally condemned, but also medically and politically defined as a major public health threat.

[29] Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 94-115.

It is important at the outset to define what health professionals mean when they speak of overweight and obesity. Overweight is defined as body weight in excess of an ideal weight, based on height- and sex-specific standards. Overweight can result from excesses of bone, muscle, fat, or, more rarely, fluid. Almost everyone who is more than 20 percent overweight is also overfat, or obese. However, not all people who are heavy are excessively fat. The relative contributions to overweight of bone, muscle, and fat vary from person to person, and it is often hard to recognize these differences. The component that actually causes weight in excess of normal is less than clear when overweight is in the more moderate range, less than 20 percent over ideal weight. This brings diagnostic difficulties for overfatness and the term obesity emerges. Obesity is defined as body fatness in excess of an age and sex specific standard. Body weights grossly in excess of standards are indicative of obesity.

More than 100 years ago, von Noorden suggested a classification of obesity into (a) an exogenous or simple type caused by manifest overeating, and (b) an endogenous type produced by, or associated with, various metabolic abnormalities.[30] In the 1950's, the work of Newburgh and his collaborators appeared to refute the existence of this latter type, and as a result attention has largely been focused on the factors regulating appetite and food intake; the usual treatment has been to reduce total calorie intake, by devious means, below the theoretical calorie requirement of the individual.[31]

In the late 1960s, Schachter and colleagues initiated a series of studies which led to the so-called 'externality theory' of obesity. Compared with their lean counterparts, both obese rats and human subjects were argued to be more reactive to external cues (time, presence of food, situational effects, etc.) and less sensitive to internal hunger and satiety signals than their lean counterparts. According to this view, high external responsiveness would, given an environment of an easily accessible, abundant and highly palatable food supply, encourage overeating and, hence, the development of obesity.[32]

These ideas became widely accepted and generated a large volume of related research in the 1970's. Many of the subsequent studies confirmed the original notion

---

[30] C. von Noorden, *Metabolism and Practical Medicine, (*Chicago: W. T. Keener, 1907), 37.

[31] L. H. Newburgh, in *Clinical Nutrition,* ed. N. Jolliffe, F. F. Tisdall and P. R. Cannon, (New York: Paul B. Hoeber Inc, 1950), 689.

[32] S. Schachter, "Some extraordinary facts about obese humans and rats," *American Psychologist* 26 (1971): 133-34.

of externality; however, many did not, and this view lost favor as it became clear that the relationship between externality and overweight is much more complex than originally proposed.[33] Nevertheless, this spawned a number of ideas which have continued to be the focus of research through to the present. In particular, in their comprehensive review of studies on human eating behavior, Spitzer and Rodin concluded that "palatability is the most consistent variable influencing amount eaten and producing overweight-normal differences in amount eaten."[34] Specifically, in experimental studies, better-liked foods are not only consumed in higher quantities than lesser-liked foods, but the magnitude of this palatability effect is reliably found to be exaggerated in obese subjects. However, the relationships amongst sensory acceptance, actual food choices and intake, and the development and maintenance of obesity have never been fully explored. Thus, the possibility that certain traits of externality contribute to a predisposition to obesity remains a plausible hypothesis.

Present knowledge is consistent with the view that preferences for, and consumption of, dietary fat are linked to weight status. Consumption of diets moderate or high in fat or energy density (with low physical activity levels) appear to be critically implicated in the development of obesity amongst susceptible individuals. There may be additional confounding effects; for example, physical activity may be associated with lower fat intakes as Simoes et al. argue,[35] and possibly also to changes in sensory or food preferences. Regardless of specific diet and lifestyle, a positive fat balance appears to be the outcome of a causal chain which might start at several points, with a range of physiological and behavioral factors potentially contributing.

If phenotypic expression of a genetic predisposition toward obesity has consumption of a high fat intake as an important precursor, then the origins of this voluntary behavior are often explained by palatability. In fact, the fundamental cause of high fat preferences and intakes in obesity remains obscure. The basis for fat preferences in general has recently been reviewed by Mela, and that analysis suggests that "post-ingestive, psycho-biological effects of fats may contribute to an associative conditioning process, through which a liking for fat-associated sensory

[33] G. R. Leon, and L. Roth, "Obesity: Causes, correlations, and speculations," *Psychological Bulletin* 84, (1977): 126.

[34] L. Spitzer, and J. Rodin, "Human eating behavior: A critical review of studies in normal weight and overweight individuals," *Appetite* 2 (1981): 308.

[35] E. J. Simoes, et al., "The association between leisure-time physical activity and dietary fat in American adults," *American Journal of Public Health* 85 (1995): 241.

qualities is acquired by experience."[36]

Fat-containing foods might conceivably have greater reinforcing psycho-biological effects for certain individuals or under certain conditions, therefore becoming more potent stimuli for the acquisition and maintenance of conditioned preferences, and increased liking. Physiologically, this might be mediated through variations in the stimulation or function of neural mechanisms involved in the acquisition or expression of hedonic responses in general. By any mechanism, however, the physiological effects of energy-dense, high-fat foods, when combined with a heightened responsiveness to such foods specifically or to palatability generally, creates ideal nutritional and psychological conditions for excessive intakes and poor weight control. Understanding of these behavioral characteristics and their links to overeating and obesity can potentially contribute to predicting responses to a natural treatment and social acceptance of obesity and fatness.

In the last fifty years, researchers explained how eating habits were related to external factors. On the other hand, some other researchers refuted the externality theory with proof on simplistic relationship between overeating and palatability. Later on, palatability was redefined also as being related to external factors affecting the body perceptions. The next part argues what external factors affect the relationship of body perceptions and eating habits, and how palatability and the amount of the food consumed can also be manipulated by different understandings of one's body in a social context.

1.4 Eating Disorders: Compulsive Eating

Nisbett in his article *Hunger, obesity, and the ventromedial hypothalamus* suggested that the obese-normal differences in eating behavior identified by Schachter[37] could be due to greater hunger experienced by obese individuals. This might be due to actual dieting or, as Nisbett originally proposed, many overweight individuals may be engaged in a chronic struggle to restrain their eating against a biological drive toward further weight gain. Dieting and restrained eating are prevalent amongst individuals whose weight is normal or below normal, and these

[36] D. J. Mela, **"**Implications of fat replacement for nutrition and food intake," *European Journal of Medical Research* 1 (1995): 81.
[37] (Schachter 1971, 129-44)

ideas therefore prompted examination of the eating behavior of subjects classified according to their degree of dietary restraint and dieting, rather than body weight alone.[38]

Subsequent studies showed that restrained subjects tended to eat more after a preload identified as high in energy, compared with the same preload identified as low in energy. Polivy claims that this counter-regulatory behavior apparently occurs when the perceived intake of energy is sufficient to cause normally restrained eaters to suspend their self-imposed restraint, thereby releasing an underlying desire to eat.[39] The pattern of thinking identified with such behavior has been characterized by Wardle as such; 'I've blown it already, so I might as well eat'.[40] Many factors other than food preloads have been shown by Baucom and Aiken to precipitate overeating in restrained eaters, such as emotional events (including anxiety), the presence of other people overeating, the sight and smell of well-liked foods, and even the anticipation of a forthcoming high food intake.[41] These findings confirm a major influence of cognition on short-term food intake, and suggest potential causal links between restraint and compulsive eating, and perhaps longer term failure of weight control.

Diet Nation by Basham, Gori and Luik offers a broad critique and is based on an extensive review of the relevant literature. One of their points is that research about the negative outcome of dieting is almost never mentioned in the dominant literature. However, Basham, Gori and Luik cite several studies that conclude that 'the stress of dieting weakens the organs, decimates lean tissue, and makes people much more vulnerable to diseases far more insidious than fat' and point to data 'that showed that those who wanted to lose weight and succeeded were significantly more likely to die young than those who stayed overweight.'[42]

As explained above, restraints create a reverse reaction towards weight control. Compulsive eating occurs mostly after one feels the need to restrain himself/herself

---

[38] R. E. Nisbett, "Hunger, obesity, and the ventromedial hypothalamus," *Psychology Reviews* 79 (1972): 437-41.

[39] J. Polivy, "Perception of calories and regulation of intake in restrained and unrestrained subjects." *Addictive Behaviors* 1 (1976): 237.

[40] J. Wardle, "Compulsive eating and dietary restraint." *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 26 (1987): 53.

[41] D. H. Baucom, and P. A. Aiken, "Effect of depressed mood on eating among obese and nonobese dieting and nondieting persons," *Journal* of *Personality and Social Psychology* 41 (1981): 584-86.

[42] Patrick Basham et al., *Diet Nation: Exposing the Obesity Crusade,* (London: The Social Affairs Unit, 2006), 251.

from the possible dangers of delicious food. That is one of the reasons why overweight people cannot break away from the vicious cycle of losing weight after a period of strict dieting and gaining higher amounts after the removal of those restraints. But these concepts of disinhibited eating are subject to refinements and investigations since the implications of maintaining dietary restraint in a culture and environment where energy-dense foods and opportunities to eat are omnipresent, while slimness is promoted as the ideal of beauty, self-control and success. In other words, palatable and energy-dense foods may not be of concern solely because of their inherent nutritional composition, but that for many individuals consumption (or even the presence) of such foods may present a particularly potent stimulus for the breakdown of restraint, loss of dietary control, and overeating of these or other foods. This loss of control over one's own body might be the basis of the fear of corpulence among the society.

From a sociological point of view, Basham, Gori and Luik's most important contribution is offered in the first chapter of *Diet Nation: Exposing the Obesity Crusade* on 'Cooking up a Scare: How Fat Became the Health Catastrophe'.[43] Their main point here is that 'the century-long Western preoccupation with thinness and the rejection of fat is very much a social construct in which obesity is increasingly associated with the morally unacceptable'.[44] They call people who advertise obesity epidemic by publicly opposing big food industries, in order to fight against obesity, as "obesity crusaders", and criticize those people in order to draw a broader picture of overweight issues including the economic drives of other markets that benefit from an obesity epidemic;

> ...their blatant misrepresentations are neither accidental nor disinterested. Rather, they are driven by enormous amounts of self interest. This is because the existence of an obesity epidemic offers enormous commercial, financial and power-maximizing opportunities for at least seven groups: the medical profession, academic researchers, the public health community, the government health bureaucracy, the pharmaceutical industry, the fitness industry and the weight-loss industry.[45]

[43] Ibid., 31–86.
[44] Ibid., p. 33.
[45] Ibid., p. 43-44.

1.5 Conclusion

This first chapter aimed at presenting different approaches on how one forms the first understandings of his/her body. The importance of perception is emphasized in relation to how self image is accumulated through the image of the other. The role of the ego in maintaining a healthy relationship between the physical and ideal experiences of oneself is examined. Corporeality, as the pure physical experiences of one, is analyzed in a way that those experiences are in constant transformation via every single encounter with other changing forms. In such a frenzy of stimuli and change, corpulence serves as a gap that one falls when he/she is incapable of processing the overflowing emotional, physical and social data. As a result the person develops habitual acts in order to cope with the overflow of mentioned data.

Whereas once fat was seen in a positive light as a token of social, economic and sexual well-being, now the reverse is true. Present cultural preferences make thinness the ideal of beauty and discriminate against fat. Alongside this cultural change, one finds a growing body of medical writing that offers the very same picture: being lean is good for one's health and being fat is not only bad for one's health but also socially and economically irresponsible. Thus, public policies are devised to 'protect' fat people from their own bad habits, thereby protecting society from their irresponsible behavior as well. Just like other risk discourses, the one on obesity revolves around power and control relationships between different social interests. Risk and blame, power and morality are intimately linked.

It is not surprising that the critical literature reviewed above is produced mostly by scientific professionals who do not belong to the obesity establishment. Within that establishment the present core of the paradigm is the conviction that obesity is a disease, which is taking on pandemic proportions. To be an obesity expert means to accept this core conviction. To doubt this conviction implies the danger of being rejected from obesity science. This is a picture that fits most disciplines, especially when their knowledge is politically significant.

Three important conclusions can be drawn from the critique above. First, the science does not support the dominant convictions about the facts and the causes of an obesity pandemic. Second, because there is no effective therapy, the solutions that are offered make the problem worse. Dieting makes more people fat and it has unhealthy side effects. Finally, as the medical science and the public policies

coincide with the dominant cultural prejudice against overweight people, they produce and legitimize discriminatory practices. Stigma and social exclusion are the result and there are several markets that benefit from such an exclusion.

The process how one becomes fat and the ways in which he/she deals with it is a highly visual process. The process is both affected by the visuality surrounding one and it proceeds with such a strong visual change in itself that in the end affects society. The next chapter focuses on the visual representations of body image by looking at examples of different body ideals throughout the history. The analysis then follows to investigate critical approaches to beauty ideals, especially concerning the female body. Finally, fat beauty is defended not as a beauty ideal but in order to create consciousness on the limits of the present social construction of bodies and the possible discriminative policies that come along with a social mania on the perception of bodies.

CHAPTER 2

Representations of Body in All Sizes

2.1 Introduction

The present ideal of beauty is historically almost unique in the sense that thinness is obsessively praised. In other times and cultures, people tend to admire fat as a representation of health and wealth. The timing of the Western cultural change seems to coincide with a change in the availability of food especially in the beginning of the twentieth-century. One hypothesis is that as soon as even the poor have enough to eat, the conspicuous consumption of food looses its appeal for the rich. Then people with economic and social power start to think of obesity in negative terms and associate fat people with classic sins such as gluttony, sloth, lust and greed.

Recent feminist analysis of Western cultural preferences focus strongly on fat politics. This kind of analysis holds that 'the greater the female position of power (in public and economic life), the greater the enforcement of an impossible weight and beauty norm'. This leads to the conclusion that 'thinness is yet another tool men use to keep women down'.[46] In this feminist tradition, LeBesco's *Revolting Bodies* is about 'the struggle to redefine fat identity'. She reminds us that 'fat people are widely represented in the popular culture and in interpersonal interactions as revolting – they are agents of abhorrence and disgust'. However, if 'we think of revolting in terms of overthrowing authority, rebelling, protesting, and rejecting, then corpulence carries a whole new weight as a subversive cultural practice that calls into

[46] J. Eric Oliver, *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 85-86.

question received notions about health, beauty, and nature'.[47] Similar theories focus more on fat politics as a tool of the upper class to rule the lower classes and the facts agree with such analysis in so far as it is true that women face much stricter weight limits that men, well-educated and richer people are thinner than less educated poor people.

Between 1880 and 1920, the Western cultural symbolism of fatness and thinness reversed. Though heaviness had signified prosperity in the nineteenth-century, as food prices fell, and as the discovery of the calorie as a unit of food energy revolutionized especially Americans' understanding of nutrition and weight, in the early twentieth century slimness became a marker of prosperity and privilege. A thin body represented not only superior knowledge of the new food science, but one's ability to purchase such costly foods as vegetables and lean meats, rather than the cheap, starchy staples associated with the immigrant poor. Peter Stern states that, in middle-class women in the 1920's in the West, a lean body signified a rejection of an older, Victorian maternal ideal and the embrace of a modern sexualized identity centered on youthfulness and physical display. As the century progressed, fatness in both sexes acquired connotations of laziness, gluttony, and even psychopathology; by the 1960's, fat bodies were regularly described by medical and psychiatric discourses as deviant, asocial, and diseased. In popular culture, fat bodies were rendered grotesque, marginal, and in many cases, invisible.[48]

Richard Klein's book *Eat Fat* offers a similar analysis in that he focuses almost entirely on culture. He does not plead for a mere acceptance of fat, he urges the public to re-evaluate the reverence of fat that previously existed in Western culture, and still exists in other cultures. In his last chapter, he tells that it 'is not this book's intention to be political, to persuade or exhort or encourage. It aims to be prophetic'. And his prophecy is that there 'will come a day when fat will be beautiful and skinny will be hated and feared, as it always has been'.[49]

Instead of focusing on the images that drive a slimness-obsessive society in the last century, this chapter will focus on the beauty ideals of the past in order to follow a similar path that Klein suggests. The first section provides images of ideal human

---

[47] Kathleen LeBesco, *Revolting Bodies: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity,* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 1-2.

[48] Peter Stearns, *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 167-89.

[49] Richard Klein, *Eat Fat* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), 210-11.

bodies in fine arts starting from the prehistoric times until the beginning of twentieth-century. All the dominating art movements of the past centuries are presented briefly in order to follow the focuses of different economic, cultural, and artistic movements that were affecting the perception of human body forms and how those perceptions were reflected in sculptures and paintings of their times.

The second section presents a specific historical analysis of 1970's and 80's on the emergence of feminist artists and their criticism and discourses on the representations of the female body. With a change of women's position in the work place, especially after the WWII, the body ideals changed drastically manipulating women to fit into norms that are too perfect to be natural. Art that focused directly on issues of the body as a theme surfaced dramatically in the late 1960's and 1970's by women artists that was inspired by the activism of political movement for women's rights. In the 1980's, feminists continued to engage with politicized issues pertaining directly to the body. Feminist movement in visual arts was highly concerning the position of women in the social structure and that was the main focus of their artistic production. Instead of analyzing how their reactions were visually presented, most of the time very direct and simple, the aim of this section is to explain the issues that were discussed by woman artists to create a ground for their artistic production in the field of visual arts which has always been based on the male gaze.

The following section provides the analysis of a contemporary Turkish feminist artist Canan Şenol's series of seven works called *Perfect Beauty*. In that series, Şenol makes visible the Ottoman understanding of female beauty with the miniatures she uses. The texts in the artworks, based on the words of the 'sagacious' men of the empire, give definitions of beauty of the Ottoman times. While Şenol criticizes the dominance of the male gaze on female beauty with her series, she also points out the differences between the beauty ideals of the past and the present.

The chapter closes arguing that beauty ideals concerning the female body has changed many times within the history and plump women were represented most of the time as the ideals. Based on the changing role of women since the modern times, unnatural and extreme slimness became the new ideal. If the present social constructions on the body change, the ideals of beauty will change again. Women artists play a significant role in the process of creating that change and they should oppose the dominant power exercised on the female bodies by being conscious about their bodies and push others for such an awareness.

2.2 Ideal Bodies Throughout the Western History of Arts

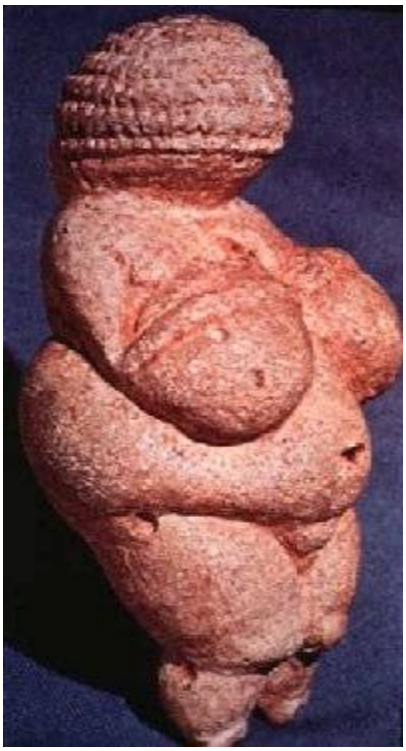
Human figure is the most analyzed and represented form in the history of visual arts. Artists of each different era in the history tried to capture the ideal human body based on the cultural; economic, religious and artistic constructions of their times. The definition of beauty is not an immanent and objective quality of things, since every age, place and social class formed its own ideal of it, ideal beauty is corresponding with the aesthetic feeling of people of a respecting period. Although it is difficult to explain beauty with a general definition, it often appeared in the artworks of the past centuries based on some combination of inner beauty, which includes psychological factors such as personality, intelligence, grace, politeness, charisma, integrity, and elegance, and outer beauty, which includes physical factors, such as health, youthfulness, facial symmetry, and body proportions. Mimesis was the driving force of the Formalist Art that is why artists until the modern era tried to capture all the properties of human beauty according to the norms of their times. Contemporary era brought ground-breaking changes to artistic traditions, and it became harder to follow the norms of beauty as art was freed from forms. On the other hand, the use of imagery also exceeded the realm of visual arts and became a commonly used medium in all different areas of social life. While visual arts was freed from mimetic forms, 'the image' in printed and visual media created its own ideals of the human body. Since 'Aesthetics' is not the main concern of the mass media, the common ground for beauty that was including both inner and outer beauty, as explained above, lost its strength and harmony in the consumable image.

This part of the analysis focuses on the representations of the ideal body images in the history of visual arts excluding the contemporary era. Most of the artworks presented below are taken from Lilith Gallery's[50] on-line art history archive on European images and show how female beauty was perceived and reflected for the sake of the analysis that will follow in the next section on the emergence of feminist artists and dominance of male gaze throughout the history of Western arts.

[50] The Lilith Gallery of Toronto, http://lilithgallery.com/.

Prehistoric Times

The most famous early image of a woman is *Venus of Villendorf* that was found in Austria from prehistoric times, about 22.000 years ago.[51] The sculpture is small in size, only 11 cm of limestone, but great in design, as it is very elaborately composed and carried out. It is believed, that it had ritual functions concerning fertility. Her great age and pronounced female forms established the *Venus of Willendorf* as an icon of prehistoric art. As the earliest known representation, she became the first woman, on the fascinating reality of the female body. The sculpture shows a woman with a large stomach that overhangs but does not hide her pubic area. A roll of fat extends around her middle, joining with large but rather flat buttocks.



. Figure 1: *Venus of Willendorf,* 10.000-15.000 BC, Austria Limestone, 11,5 cm; Vienna

A characteristic of all the Paleolithic "Venus" figurines exhibited by the Willendorf statuette is the lack of a face, which for Withcombe, arguing that the face is a key feature in human identity, means that she is to be regarded as an anonymous sexual object rather than a person; it is her physical body and what it represents that is important. Another characteristic of Paleolithic "Venus" figurines is the lack of feet. In the archaeological report of her finding, the Willendorf statuette is described as perfectly preserved in all its parts, so it appears she never had feet. It has been suggested that possibly the intention was to curtail the figurine's power to leave wherever she had been placed. A more common explanation is that because the statuette served as a fertility idol, the sculptor included only those parts of the female body needed for the conception and nurture of children.[52] In any case, compared with the other Paleolithic figurines in this group, the *Venus of Willendorf* is a remarkably realistic representation of a fat woman.

[51] Christopher L. C. E. Witcombe, "Women in Prehistory: The Venus of Willendorf," *Images of Women in Ancient Art*, (2003), http://witcombe.sbc.edu/willendorf/willendorfdiscovery.html.

[52] Christopher L. C. E. Witcombe, "Women in Prehistory: Woman from Willendorf," *Images of Women in Ancient Art*, (2003), http://witcombe.sbc.edu/willendorf/willendorfwoman.html.

Ancient Egypt

The woman figure on the ivory plaque on the right is Ankhesenamun, the wife of the Paharaoh Tutankhamun, is almost thirty-five hundred years old, from ancient Egypt. This part of the ivory coffer lid depicts the wife, but the original was decorated with a carved relief of a garden promenade of Tutankhamun and his wife Ankhesenamun together.

As a common female beauty form of ancient Egypt, Ankhesenamun has a delicate and refined fashion, and a slim female body. It is stated that the ladies were shaved entirely, and to emphasize this, their pleated skirts were worn wide open in front.[53]

Figure 2: *Ankhesenamun, Wife of Pharaoh Tut,* 1350 BC, Ivory chest (part 30x20 cm), Cairo

Antiquity: Ancient Greece

This well known drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci, about 1500, relates to the architectural treatise, to survive from Antiquity, by Vitruvus Pollio. Although it is unillustrated, it profoundly influenced art throughout history, especially in the period Renaissance. Vitruv, in the first century BC, reports the classical ideal of beauty as derived from symmetry and a modular relationship, of the parts to the whole on a mathematical basis. The smaller part compares to the larger as this to the whole, that is called the Golden Ratio.[54]

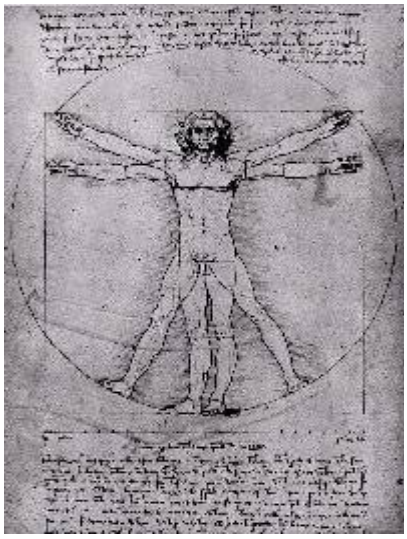


Figure 3: Leonardo Da Vinci, *Vitruvian Man*, ~1500, Drawing, after Vitruvius 1st C. BC; Venice, Acad.

[53] Squid Who is Ankhesenamun, "Ankhesenamun-Tutankhamun's Wife," Squid Who., http://www.squidoo.com/ankhesenamun

[54] Helen South, excerpt from the *Ten Books of Architecture by Vitruvius Polio* , http://drawsketch.about.com/od/leonardodavincidrawings/a/vitruviusman.htm

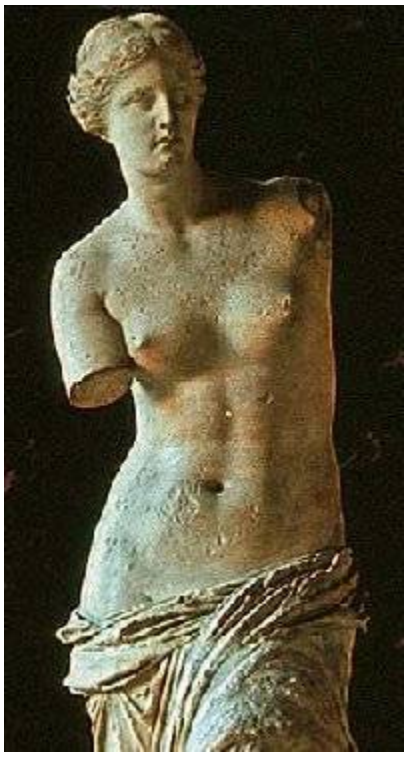


Figure 4: *Venus de Milo,* 2nd C. BC, Marble, 203 cm high

Figure 5:*Warrior of Riace,* Bronze, Over 2 m high; South Italy, Reggio di Calabria

Architecture was seen as an imitation of nature with human proportions. Vitruv distinguished the three column types as Doric, Ionic and Corinthian, the proportions deriving respectively from a man, a matron and a young girl. Art and science (and also nature) were considered as completely homogenous, as a unit.[55]

Socrates postulated, that the main task of the artist was to give a standard idealized contour of the human body in exact proportions to gain balance and harmony. According to him, the artist was already two removes away from the ideal because the craftsman was the first one to imitate "the idea" for useful purposes and the artist was imitating the products of the craftsman. Human beauty, in that sense, was already mimicking the idea of beauty so the artist had to use the same proportions in order not to delude the viewer into imperfection.[56] One can still admire this approximity of ideal proportions in the statue of the *Venus de Milo*, one of the most famous works of art history.

In the same way as this beautiful ideal image of a man's body, the so-called *Warrior of Riace*, found in the Mediterranean Sea in August 1972, now in Naples.[57] These personified ideals of classical beauty have influenced art throughout the centuries until today.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Plato, *The Republic*, (United Kingdom: Penguin Books Ltd., 2007), 421-39.

[57] J. Alsop, "Warriors From A Watery Grave," *National Geographic* 163 (1983): 821.

Antiquity: Hellenism/Ancient Rome

The Hellenistic conception of art derived from natural life, as the Romans were more pragmatic than the Greeks. It was realistic and therefore allowed the first individual portraits in history. The image below shows the sculpture of *Aphrodite Kallipygos*, goddess with perfectly shaped buttocks, made about 100 BC.

Figure 6: *Aphrodite Kallipygos,* Marble, 150 cm, Copy of ~ 100 BC; Naples

The rear becomes the focus of attention, the main view.

Early Middle Ages

In the genesis scenes of the *Grandval Bible* from the early Middle Ages, about 840, it is possible to see, how the consideration of physical characteristics, the proportions and harmony of the design, had become unimportant. The human beings live religiously, beyond earthly reality, and the emphasis on human beauty fades away in God's garden.

Figure 7: Caroline Bookpaintry, *Adam and Eve*, Grandval Bible ~ 840; London, Brit. M.

Late Middle Ages

Below, there is a paradise scene on a miniature from the book *Les trés riches heures du Duc de Berry*, a prayer book of the French king's brother, originating from about 1400.[58] It is not difficult to realize that a significant change in art had taken place from the rough drawings of the Early Middle Ages to the soft style of the Late Middle Ages. A luxurious, refined fashion emerges again, with slim silhouettes. The ideal of a beautiful female body appears as having a belly and looking pregnant.

[58] University of Chicago Humanities, "Les trés riches heures du Duc de Berry," University of Chicago, http://humanities.uchicago.edu/images/heures/heures.html.

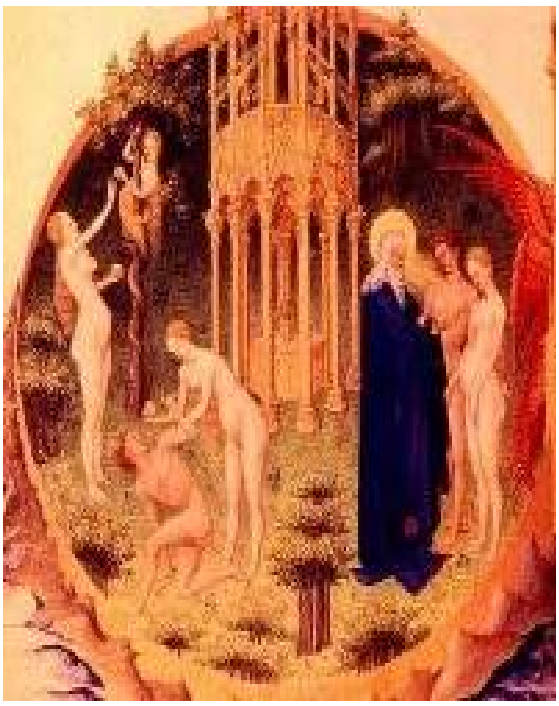


Figure 8: Limbourg Bros., *Trés riches heures: Paradise*, Praying book of the Duke of Berry, ~ 1440; Paris

Early Renaissance

The Renaissance intended to revive the classical antique style of symmetry and proportions as their ideal of beauty. The treatise of Vitruv inspired the world. At the same time the artisan changed from a craftsman to a scientist and intellectual. Now attention is drawn from religious to profane, worldly themes, for the first time in history after the Hellenistic era of Ancient Rome. Boticelli's *Birth of Venus* is one of the most famous paintings of the Early Renaissance.

The ideals of female body that are personified below in the painting of Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*, had an immense affect until modern times, as well as this special invention of a reclining nude.

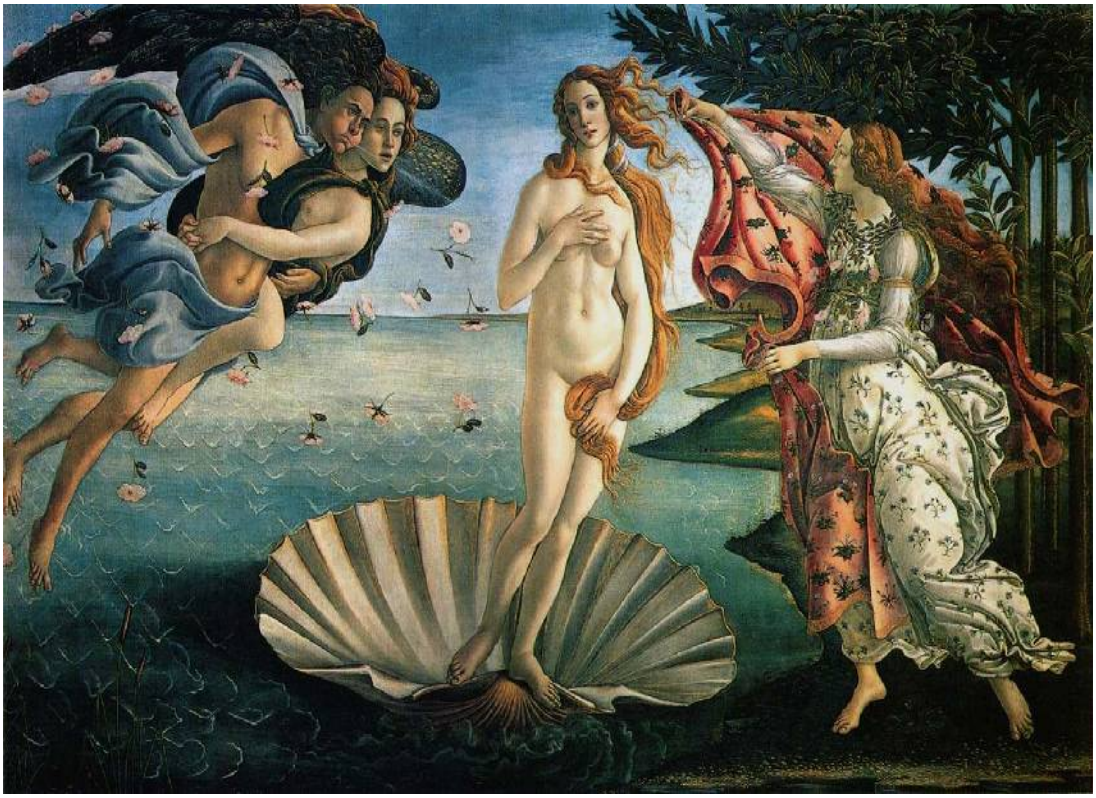


Figure 9: Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, 1486, Oil on Canvas, 175 x 278 cm; Uffiz

Figure 10: Giorgione, *Sleeping Venus*, 1505, Oil on Canvas, 82 x 73 cm;

Late Renaissance

A painting in the style of late Renaissance, that is Mannerism. Mannerism is notable for its intellectual sophistication as well as its artificial, as opposed to naturalistic, qualities. San Friano painted human figures at a diamond mine in an exaggerated manner, such as excessive limbs that are far away from classical proportions.

Figure11: Maso da San Friano, *Diamond Mine* ~ 1570, Oil Painting; Florence, Pal. Vecchio

Figure 12: Jacob Jordaens, *The Wife of King Kandaules*, 1646, Oil Painting; Stockholm

Baroque

Baroque style is characterized by dynamic movement, clear and visible emotion, and self-confident rhetoric. The intensity and immediacy of baroque art, observed in such things as the convincing rendering of cloth and skin textures, is compelling. On the left, there is the *Wife of King Kandaules* by Jacob Jordaens, contemporary of Rubens. The ladies in Flemish Baroque Paintings

are in fuller-bodies, luxuriant and voluptuous. Below, there is a painting from Rubens. Rubens is famous of his history paintings of mythological and allegorical subjects.[59] The female figures in this painting are beyond being plump, especially the lower figure almost have the muscle structures of a man at her back. Also the women's arms and legs are far away from being feminine in the present sense.

Figure 13: P.P. Rubens, *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, 1618, Oil On Canvas, 224 x 210.5 cm; Munich.

[59] Julius S. Held, "On the Date and Function of Some Allegorical Sketches by Rubens," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 38 (1975): 219.

Rococo

The later Baroque style gradually gave way to a more decorative style, the Rococo. The word Rococo is seen as a combination of the French *rocaille*, meaning stone, and *coquilles*, meaning shell, due to reliance on these objects as motifs of decoration.[60] In Rococo, ladies became graceful and petite, the ideal was a very slim waist line. On the right, there is *Leda Commedia dell'arte* by Franz Anton Bustelli.

In general, the style was best expressed through delicate porcelain sculpture rather than imposing marble statues. The colors became refracted with white or even dark.

Figure 14: F.A. Bustelli, *Leda Commedia dell'arte*, ~ 1760, Porcelain, 20 cm high

Classicism

The painting below, *Jupiter and Thetis* is steeped in the traditions of both classical and neoclassical art, most notably in its grand scale. It was painted to meet the artist's obligations to the French Academy, and although its overhand tone correctly reflected the patriarchal bias of Napoleon's regime in its contrast between male power and female subservience, it is generally regarded as a rejection of such values. Ingres highly regarded the painting, and in a manner it sets out the great motifs of his career: the voluptuousness of the female character and the authoritative austerity on the male deity.[61]

[60] Monique Wagner, *From Gaul to De Gaulle: An Outline of French Civilization,* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005):139.

[61] Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism, 1800-1815*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 206-7.

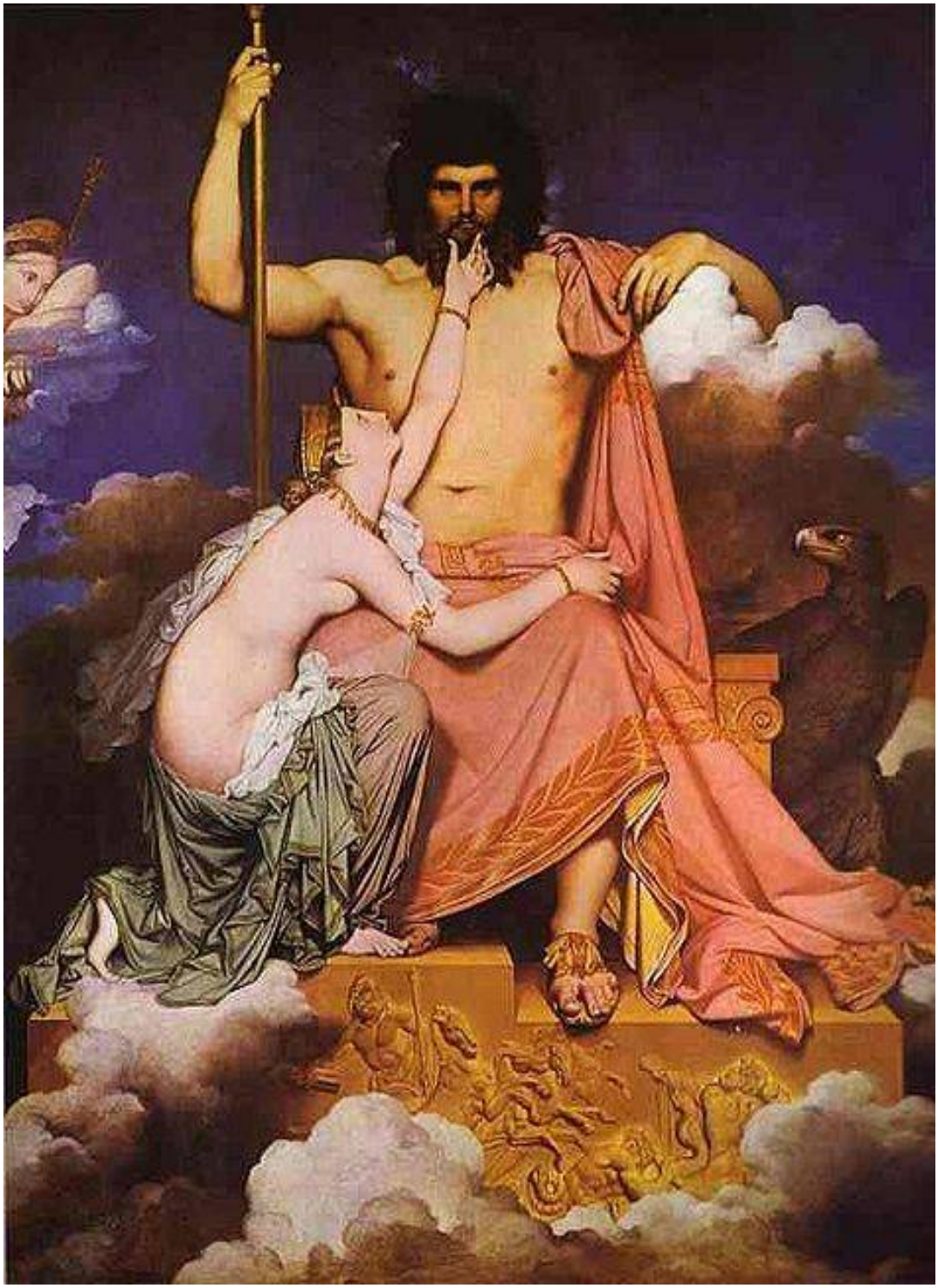


Figure 15: Jean Dominique Ingres, *Jupiter and Thetis*, ~ 1810, Oil on Canvas, 330 x 260 cm; Aix-en-Provence

Figure 16: Francisco Goya, *The Mayas*, 1798-1800, Oil on Canvas, 97 × 190 cm; Madrid, Prado

Romanticism

Two of Goya's best known paintings are The Nude Maya and The Clothed Maya. They depict the same woman in the same pose, naked and clothed, respectively. Without a pretense to allegorical or mythological meaning, the painting was "the first totally profane life-size female nude in Western art". In 1813, the Inquisition confiscated both works as 'obscene'.[62]

In Romanticism, another classicistic era, the ideal again approaches Antiquity with a flowing silhouette.

Orientalism

Half a century later in a new epoch, Ingres turns to the Orientalist current with a different sense of beauty of soft curves and magical fairyland. Ingres copies a passage entitled "Description of the women's bath at Adrionaple" by Lady Mary Montegau in his notebook in 1825:

Figure 17: Ingres, *Turkish Bath*, 1862, Oil on Canvas, 108 cm; Paris

> "I believe there were two hundred women there in all. Beautiful naked women in various poses... some conversing, others at their work, others drinking coffee or tasting a sorbet, and many stretched out nonchalantly, whilst their slaves (generally ravishing girls of 17 or 18 years) plaited their hair in fantastical shapes."[63]

---

[62] Fred Licht, *Goya: The Origins of the Modern Temper in Art*, (New York: Universe Books, 1979), 83.

[63] Louvre Museum, "The Turkish Bath," http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226335&CURRENT_LLV_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226335&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500815&bmLocale=en .

Figure 18: Toulouse-Lautrec, *Ball At the Moulin Rouge*, ~ 1890, Oil on Canvas,122x 140 cm;

Impressionism

Toulouse-Lautrec's painting *Ball at Moulin Rouge* shows one generation later in the epoch of Impressionism with the new fashion of slim waist again, and the buttocks are emphasized again after almost exactly 2000 years. Toulouse-Lautrec's depiction of people relied on his painterly style which is linear and with great emphasis on contour.

Art Nouveau/Jugendstil

Jugendstil or Art Nouveau liberates the female body contours from corset once again, and the natural curves appear again as a hundred years ago, but this time on a flat, patterned surfaces. On the right, there is Hodler's huge painting *The Day II* of 1905.

Figure 19: Ferdinand Hodler, *19.The Day II*, 1905, 160x360 cm; Zurich

Figure 20: Max Beckmann, *Dancing in Baden-Baden*, 1923, Oil on Canvas, 100x65cm; Munich

Expressionism

After the horror of the First World War only practicability was important. It was not important to reproduce an aesthetically pleasing impression of the artistic subject matter; the Expressionists focused on capturing vivid emotional reactions through powerful colors and dynamic compositions instead.[64] In the era of Bauhaus the difference between the sexes vanishes for the first time in art history. Curves are no longer an ideal, as on the left in the *Dancing in Baden-Baden* by Max Beckmann, 1923.

[64] Artmovements, Expressionism, www.artmovements.co.uk/expressionism.htm.

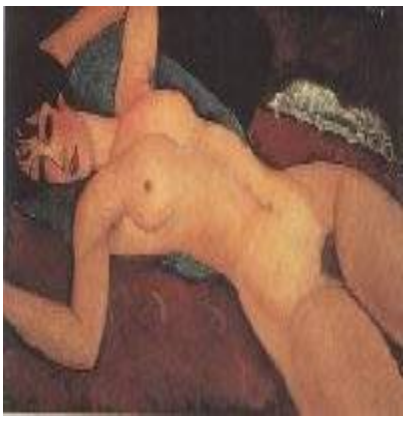


Figure 21: Amadeo Modigliani *Reclining Female Nude*, 1917, Oil on Canvas, 60.6 x 92.7 cm; Milan

Modern Era

Primarily a figurative artist, Modigliani known for his paintings and sculptures in a modern style characterized by mask-like faces and elongation of form. The *Reclining Female Nude*, also known as the *Red Nude* by Modigliani[65], presents a beautiful and ideal body that is closer to the beauty ideal of the present.

Nevertheless, in contemporary art the variety is vast and there seems to be no more universal ideal. Although the images presented above offer a limited analysis of the human body ideals of the whole Western art history, the artworks chosen are of the most important ones of their times and they roughly offer a chronological understanding on the changes of the human body ideals. One important issue to note here is that all the ideal body forms are presented through the male gaze. It is only very recent that women speak of the ways they perceive beauty just for a few decades. When compared to the history of male dominance in visual arts as well as other fields of social life, women's involvement in art production is of great value to comprehend the changing social norms on the body.

Next section presents the important theories and women's critical standpoint in art production especially concerning the female body. Transformation of women's involvement in visual arts from 'the object' to 'the subject' was only possible first by questioning what that object—the body—meant to the subject.

[65] Artchive, Amedeo Modigliani, www.artchive.com/artchive/M/modigliani.html.

2.3 Critique of the Male Gaze in Art History

The nature of female imagery in art has been an important issue for feminist art history. As art historians began to think of art as "a purposeful, active, and vital shaper of culture,"[66] in Larry Silver's words, images of women in art were seen to embody different and more complex meanings. The issue of woman's presence in art as an embodiment of male fears and desires was incisively discussed by John Berger. He used the personification of Vanitas as an example of men's moralizing through the female nude: "You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting Vanity, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure." The real function of the mirror, the symbol of woman's vanity, is to make her "connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight."[67]

Berger raised three significant issues in this passage: first, the use of the female nude for the purpose of hypocritical moralizing in an androcentric society; second, the moral condemnation of the woman whose nakedness the male artist liked to paint and the male patron liked to own; and, third, the use of the mirror to make woman an accomplice in her own objectification as "sight." Central to these and most other treatments of the female nude is the notion that "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."[68]

Linda Nochlin, in "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art," demonstrated that the meaning of the term "erotic" is confined to "erotic for men." She observed that "the imagery of sexual delight or provocation has always been created about women for men's enjoyment, by men," and added that the equivalent sexual imagery created by women has been blocked by "woman's lack of her own erotic territory on the map of nineteenth-century reality." This, she believes, happened because "women have no imagery available with which to express their particular view-point."[69]

A different approach to an analysis of images of women was taken by Carol

---

[66] Larry Silver, "The State of Research in Northern European Art of the Renaissance Era," Art Bulletin 118, (1986): 527.

[67] (Berger 2008, 47)

[68] Ibid.

[69] Linda Nochlin, *Woman as Sex Object. Studies in Erotic Art 1730-1970*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin, (New York: Newsweek Inc., 1972), 379.

Duncan, who discussed the effect of images of women on the viewer, and their role as shapers of culture and ideology. In "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," Duncan situated the increasing popularity of such secular themes as happy motherhood and marital bliss in French art and literature within the complex social, cultural, and economic parameters of the growing campaign in eighteenth-century France to convince women that motherhood was their natural and joyful role. She concluded that both art and literature were part of a campaign, at a time of social and political transition, to convince women of their proper roles within the emerging modern bourgeois state.[70]

In "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting," Duncan discussed the power of art to position and control those it represents, in this case the female nude as used by the Fauves, Cubists, German Expressionists, and other vanguard artists before World War I. She asserted that their images of powerless, often faceless nudes, and "passive available flesh," are witnesses to the artist's sexual virility. These women are represented as "the other," a race apart, "in total opposition to all that is civilized and human."[71] According to Duncan, such images reflect the male need to demonstrate cultural supremacy at a time when the struggle for women's rights was at its height.

In a third article, Duncan, similarly but more specifically than Nochlin, redefined the basic meaning of the term "erotic," not as "a self-evident universal category, but as a culturally defined concept that is ideological in nature."[72] She demonstrated that female nudes by artists as stylistically diverse as Delacroix, Ingres, Munch, Miro, Picasso, and Willem de Kooning are conditioned by the same personal psychology. They also have the same effect, to teach women to see themselves "in terms of dominating male interests." The obsession with the confrontation between the submissive female nude and the sexual-artistic will of the male artist in these paintings, in which the male "I" prevails on the fundamental instinctual level of experience, can be seen as an expression of cultural symptoms.[73] Her article was important in recognizing and articulating the ideological construct of the female in art and the asymmetry of meanings carried by male and female images.

---

[70] Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth- Century French Art," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, New York, 1982 200-19.

[71] Ibid., 381-83.

[72] Carol Duncan, "The Esthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art," Heresies 1 (1977): 47.

[73] Ibid.

2.4 The Female Sensibility

One of the most heated debates during the first decade of feminism in the 1970's, which seemed to demand a position from most writers and artists, was the possibility of a female sensibility and aesthetic expressed in contemporary art. Gloria Orenstein considered it a "central theoretical question." Non-commital concerning the nature of its existence, but indicating that the concept of the female sensibility produced a "new liberating tendency in art for many women," Orenstein pointed to the self-conscious investigation of female body imagery, and of female experience generally, as well as the new audience of females that it addressed.[74] Womanhouse project, a women-only art installation and performance, that grew out of Judy Chicago's and Miriam Schapiro's Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts in 1972 , was one of the first manifestations of the female aesthetic. In reference to the project, Schapiro speaks of West Coast women bringing a "new subject matter into their art - the subject matter was the content of their own life experiences, and the aesthetic form was to be dictated by this new content. What formerly was considered trivial was heightened to the level of serious art- making."[75] Most feminist artists not only seemed to accept the existence of such an aesthetic on some level, but also the need to explore it, as Vivian Gornick pointed out in 1973:

> To achieve wholeness women must break through to the center of their experience, and hold that experience up to the light of consciousness if their lives are to be transformed. They must struggle to "see" more clearly, to remember more accurately, to describe more fully who and what they have always been. For centuries the cultural record of our experience has been a record of male experience. It is the male sensibility that has apprehended and described our life. It is the maleness of experience that has been a metaphor for human existence.[76]

A whole body of research in psychology, literature, art, and sociology, indicates that women perceive reality differently than men, and therefore have different expectations of and responses to human experience. Carol Gilligan's psychological study presents the view of many of these revisionist texts with the

[74] Gloria Orenstein, "Review Essay: Art History," *Signs* 1 (Winter 1975): 511-12.
[75] Miriam Schapiro, "The Education of Women as Artists: Project Womanhouse," *Art Journal* 31 (1972): 268.
[76] Vivian Gornick, "Toward a Definition of Female Sensibility", *Essays in Feminism*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 112.

following thesis: “Given the differences in women's conceptions of self and morality, women bring to the life cycle a different point of view and order human experience in terms of different priorities.”[77]

The question was first formulated with respect to the sources and the nature of the female sensibility. Was it biologically determined? Or was it purely a social construct? Lucy Lippard claimed to be able to recognize female sexual or body imagery in art by women as such; “Vaginal iconology was as much a political as an essentialist or erotic statement, an attempt to challenge the notion of female inferiority and 'penis envy,'[78] as well as to establish and reclaim a sense of female power.” Miriam Schapiro, too, said that “our discovery of the 'central core image' was a way of making ideological statements for ourselves, a kind of subject matter that was surfacing in the art of other women and finally an explication of how that subject matter can be disguised.”[79]

Elaine Showalter's study of what she calls feminist bio-criticism concludes that “it is useful and important to study biological imagery, but there can be no expression of the body which is unmediated by linguistic, social, and literary structures.”[80] Her ideal model centers on a theory of women's culture that incorporates ideas about women's body, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur. French feminist Julia Kristeva also writes with regard to the way woman's different viewpoint conditions her place in the world:

> Sexual difference - which is at once biological, physiological, and relative to reproduction is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which is the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language, and meaning.[81]

Many contemporary feminists focus on the question of representation and gender difference. Postmodernist artists and writers believe that representation is at

---

[77] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 22.

[78] Lucy Lippard, "Sexual Politics: Art Style," in *From the Center Feminist Essays in Women's Art*, (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1976), 29.

[79] (Schapiro 1972, 270)

[80] Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter, (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 133.

[81] Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," in *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology,* ed. Nannerl O. et al., (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), 39.

the very root of the difference between male and female in the society. Both feminists and postmodern cultural philosophers understand representation not as a mimesis of some ultimate reality, but rather as a way of reflecting the culture's vision of itself. Representation thus legitimizes culture's dominant ideology, and is therefore inevitably politically motivated. It constructs difference through a representation of preconditioned concepts about gender that inform all the institutions and that are at the very foundation of the society's ideology and system of beliefs. The artist Mary Kelly claims that "there is no preexisting sexuality, no essential femininity. To look at the processes of their construction is also to see the possibility of deconstructing the dominant forms of representing difference and justifying subordination in the social order."[82]

Another related concern in feminist art and theory is the exploration of female sexuality. Since the feminist art movement began in 1970, feminist artists have been getting in touch with and reclaiming their bodies, their sexual feelings and expressing those in art. In the mid-1970's, feminist artists such as Joan Semmel and Hannah Wilke attempted to generate new expressions of female sexuality that denied what they saw as the passivity and idealization of past images of women represented through the male gaze. Harmony Hammond states that in such "women-centered" art, women present themselves as "strong, healthy, active, comfortable with their bodies, in contrast to the misogynist attitudes toward women's bodies and bodily functions that we observe throughout the history of western art."[83]

Lisa Tickner indicates the problem with such an attempt to express female sexuality in art when she questions the basic assumption that women "will find a cultural voice to express their own sexuality." She expresses reservations about any static definition of sexuality:

> The fallacy here exists in the implication that there is a definitely defined male sexuality that can simply find expression and an already existent female sexuality that simply lacks it. Women's social and cultural relations have been located within patriarchal culture, and their identities have been moulded in accordance with the roles and images which that ideology has sanctioned.[84]

Women had no language before with which to express their sexuality except

---

[82] Mary Kelly, "No Essential Femininity: A Conversation between Mary Kelly and Paul Smith," *Parachute* 26, (Spring 1982): 35.

[83] Harmony Hammond, "A Sense of Touch," *New Art Examiner* (Summer 1979): 78.

[84] Lisa Tickner, "The Body Politics: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970," *Art History* 1 (1978): 238.

the male one, and it is difficult to determine even what that sexuality is in women-centered terms. The first question then was how, against this inherited framework, women are to construct new meanings which can also be understood. Tickner thus maintains that "the most significant area of women and erotic art today is that of the de-eroticizing, the de-colonizing of the female body; the challenging of its taboos; and the celebration of its rhythms and pains, of fertility and childbirth."[85]

2.5 "Unfixing" the Feminine

A second generation of feminists has abandoned the issue of female sexuality, and of female sensibility, in favor of an investigation of the workings and interactions of gender differences rather than the nature of the specifically female. Instead of restructuring the "colonized and alienated female body" as Tickner saw many first-generation feminist artists doing,[86] from Sylvia Sleigh to Hannah Wilke, artists such as Barbara Kruger and Mary Kelly are deconstructing it. Those artists analyze "how meaning is produced and organized" and therefore undermine "the structures of domination."[87] As Jane Weinstock records, this attitude expresses the shift that has occurred in feminist art and criticism in the 1980's.

Early states of feminist thought emphasized the condition and experience of being female, and attempted to diminish and minimize the importance of differences because difference from men meant inequality and continued oppression. Women thus set out to document the worlds of women and their experience, previously excluded from analysis. The shift in emphasis for second-generation feminists has been not to minimize difference but to assert its importance as a crucial focus of study.

In other words, the first position, sometimes termed essentialist, conceives of woman as a fixed category determined through societal and cultural institutions, and less often through the concept of an inherent and biological female nature. Its advocates often attempt to characterize or celebrate specifically female attributes, within a separatist mode, or to reveal the history and the nature of the repressions of woman within those categories. The second sees woman as an unfixed category,

[85] Ibid., 239.
[86] Ibid., 247.
[87] Jane Weinstock, "A Lass, A Laugh and a Lad," *Art in America* (Summer 1983): 8.

constantly in process, examined through her representations and ideological constructions within a male system. Rather than a definition of gender per se, of woman, the issue becomes, as Tickner puts it, "the problematic of culture itself, in which definitions of femininity are produced and contested and in which cultural practices cannot be derived from or mapped directly onto a biological gender."[88] Second-generation artists and critics are concerned rather with an interrogation of an unfixed femininity produced in specific systems of signification:

> The most important contribution of the feminism under consideration here is the recognition of the relations between representation and sexed subjectivity in process, and of the need to intervene productively within them. The artists considered here hold the common aim of "unfixing" the feminine, unmasking the relations of specularity that determine its appearance in representation, and undoing its position as a "marked term" which ensures the category of the masculine as something central and secure. [89]

Tickner links the development of the later position to the understanding of the "psycho-social construction of sexual difference":

> The result was a shift in emphasis from equal rights struggles in the sexual division of labor and a cultural feminism founded on the revaluation of an existing biological or social femininity to a recognition of the processes of sexual differentiation, the instability of gender positions, and the hopelessness of excavating a free or original femininity beneath the layers of patriarchal oppression.[90]

The contribution of the first generation of American feminists has been important as groundwork, despite its limitations. Feminist art historians were first interested in recovering the lost history of women artists and in reinterpreting images from a female viewpoint in order to reveal and critically analyze the roles women have been assigned in history. They also have criticized the canon of art history seen as a linear progression of male geniuses, based on a hierarchy of art still embodied in art history textbooks. As it became clear that these judgments were arbitrary, and not universal absolutes, women artists and critics began to question the nature of the discipline that nurtured them.

---

[88] Lisa Tickner, "Sexuality and/ in Representation: Five British Artists," *Difference. On Representation and Sexuality*, exh. cat., (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 23.

[89] Ibid., 28.

[90] Ibid., 19.

2.6 Contemporary Turkish Feminist Art: Canan Şenol's *Perfect Beauty* Series

Canan Şenol is a contemporary feminist artist that occupies a position similar to the second-generation feminist artists of the 1980's America with her discourse and artistic approach. She criticizes the domination and possession of the power sources on individuals with a feminist standpoint, focusing on the basis of patriarchal, religious and political factors shaping the daily life. In her own words:

> I describe my work with the feminist slogan that is still pertinent today: "Personal is political." I start from the point of view that the ideological system is following the path to "body restriction" by spying on and normalizing us by means of controlling our personal lives. I am questioning the governing power of such institutions as religion, government, society and family on our private lives.
>
> I focus my work on the concepts that are glorified, that are transformed into taboos, that are not talked about, and that have a continuum without being questioned. Daily life has been the biggest influence on my work. From this point of view the artwork becomes provocative, aggressive, erotic, risky and violent. Artwork, then, has the act of meeting the private with public space.[91]

Born in Istanbul in 1970, Şenol graduated from the Department of Business Administration in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Marmara University. She continued her study in the Painting Department in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Marmara University and graduated in 1998. In 2006, she studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. [92]

Her series of seven works called 'Perfect Beauty', exhibited in Scope Basel 2009 before, and in her solo exhibition 'Even a Cat Has a Mustache' opened in 21st of January 2010 at Gallery X-ist, interrogates the mutuality of body politics, and signalizes the masculine point of view behind the opposing present and past beauty definitions.

---

[91] Brooklyn Museum, "Canan Şenol," http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/canan_senol.php.

[92] Turkish Culture Foundation, "Canan Şenol," http://www.turkishculture.org/whoiswho/visual-arts/canan-senol-1178.htm.

Figure 22: *Perfect Beauty Series – Blackness,* mixed media on special paper, 35*50 cm, 2009

Darkness (English translation of the text; "*Perfect Beauty* – Canan Şenol" X-ist ex. cat., 2010)

Sagacious men have stated that, regarding darkness, or the elements that ornament and add grace to the face of a woman, there are four that beautify her appearance. The first is black hair, the second is black eyelashes, the third, black brows and the fourth, black eyes.

In all the seven works, the miniatures she re-worked are almost the same as the originals from the Ottoman archives with a slight manipulation of the women's faces. Şenol replaced the original faces with her own face. On the left side, she uses traditional calligraphy around the images she created that are resembling the miniature style. In an interview she gave to İlke Kamar from BirGün Newspaper, she explains the strong correlation of the past and the present in her works as such:

> While the past is refreshing memory, it aims to question and make the present clear. Art history comprises a visual memory. Although the written history is in a way reliable, it might be re-written. That is why I believe that the visual and verbal memory is very important for memory continuum. Art history that involves the past visual memory results in a comprehension of the reasonings of today's policies. In that sense, the use of miniature language in my works helps to refresh the visual memory of the past and memory continuum.[93]

[93] BirGün Gazetesi, "Kedilerin de bıyıkları vardır," trans. Pelin Güre, http://www.birgun.net/culture_index.php?news_code=1264597572&year=2010&month=01&day=27.

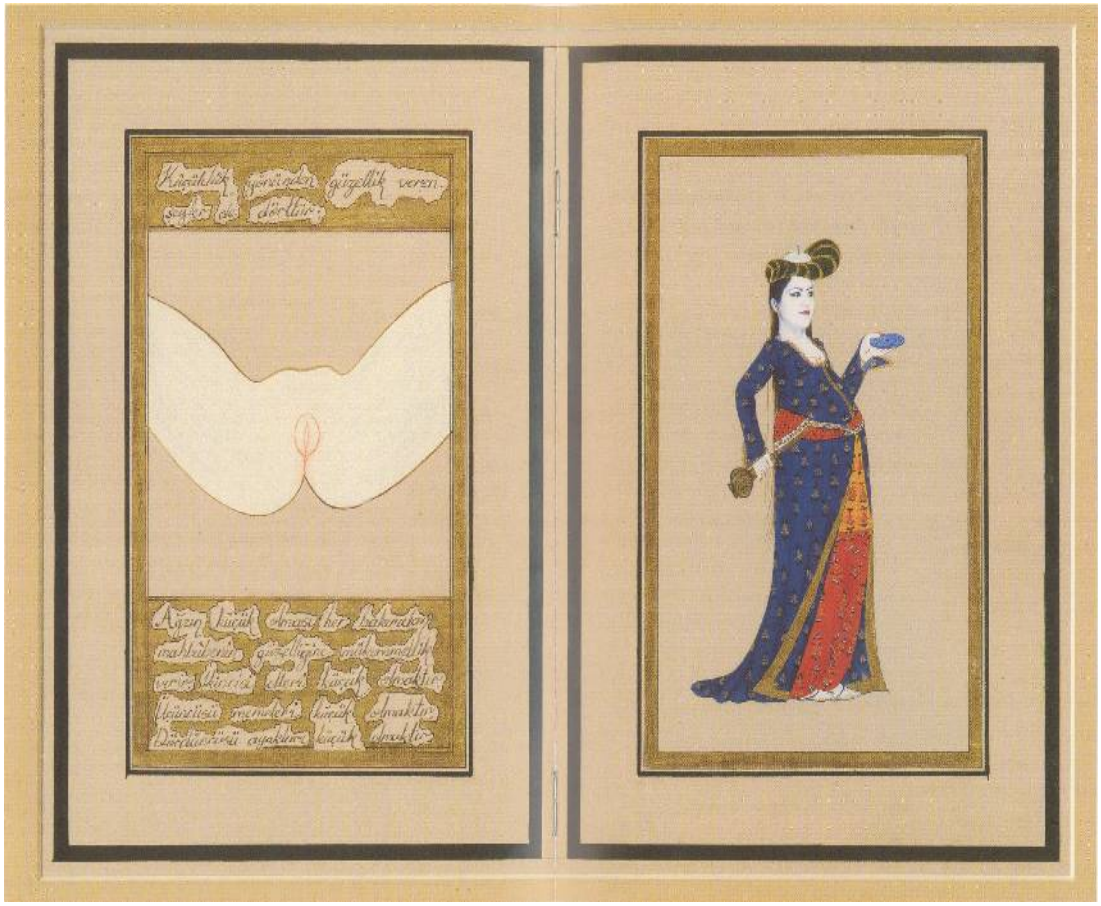


Figure 23: *Perfect Beauty Series – Smallness,* mixed media on special paper, 30*50 cm, 2009

Smallness (English translation of the text; "*Perfect Beauty* – Canan Şenol" X-ist ex. cat., 2010)

There are four elements which lend beauty from the aspect of small size. First, a small mouth will always add perfection to the beloved's beauty. The second is small hands. The third is small breasts, and the fourth is small feet.

Instead of creating a new female sensibility, Şenol attacks the prevalent norms on the female body with a great sense of humor. Although the language she prefers to use is not common anymore, the same discourse still applies to the contemporary woman on how she should look and act like. Her miniature-like images on the left side of the artworks offer a direct criticism to the defined rules of the past on the female appearance and a subtle one to the present definitions of women's bodies that are just not written as boldly as the past rules but still dominate the society by using other mediums.

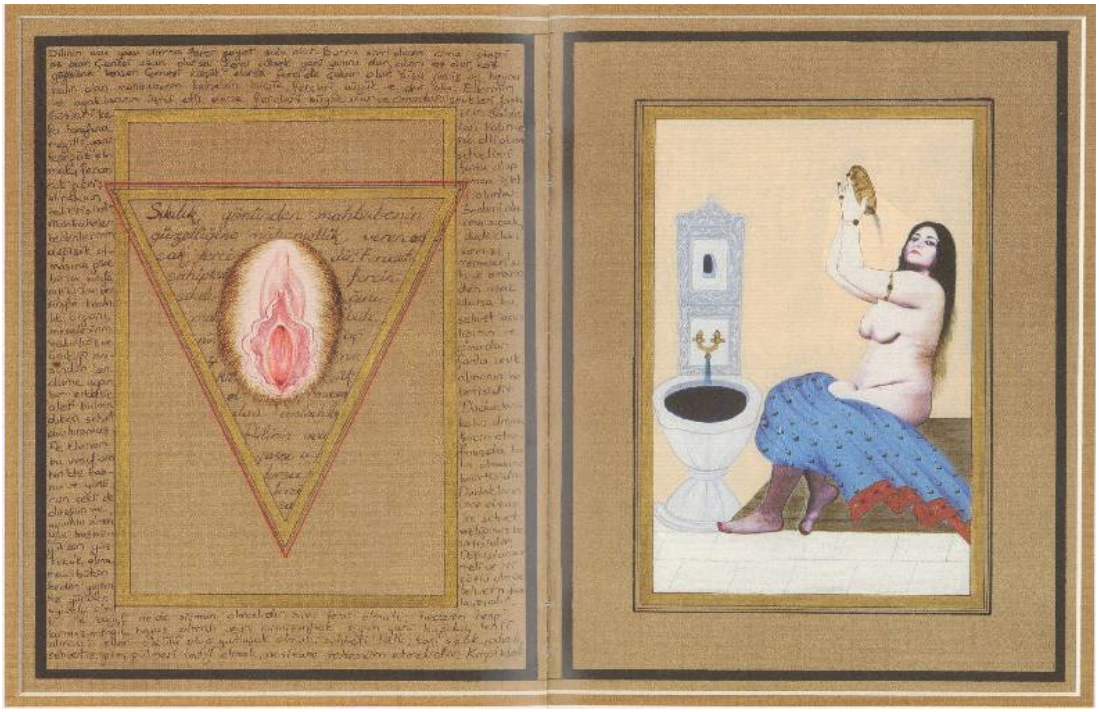


Figure 24: *Perfect Beauty Series – Tightness,* mixed media on special paper, 35*50 cm, 2009

Tightness (English translation of the text; "*Perfect Beauty* – Canan Şenol" X-ist ex. cat., 2010)

It is from the standpoint of the tightness that the female organ perfects the beauty of the beloved. Persons of discernment have come to understand that the tightness of the cleft is indicated by the small mouth the beloved. If the end of her tongue is flat, that is an indication that her cranny is extremely wet. If her nose is pointed, she will have but little desire for intercourse. If her chin is long, her fissure will also be high, that is protuberant, its hairs sparse, and will resemble the breast of a goose. If her chin is small, so will her aperture be deep. If the beloved's face is white and her neck thick, her hips will be small and her cleft long and narrow. If the tops of her hand and feet are well-padded, her cranny will also be big and her pleasure in intercourse will be excessive. If their calves are thick and tight, their lust will be great and they will be desirous of intercourse. If the body is always warm, the lips red, the breasts firm and widely separated, this is a sign of exaggerated licentiousness and an excessive pleasure in intercourse. A thickness of the lips signifies that the area surrounding the aperture is thick as well, whereas thinness of the lips indicates a paucity of sensuality. The possession from birth of large and heavily outlined eyes is proof of excessive licentiousness and a small and narrow cleft. If the eyes are close to the head, or low-browed, it is an indication of a wide cleft. Lovers can be separated into a few different classes according to the differences in their bodies. This classification mandates that, if the female organ does not find a male tool that is appropriate to it in terms of size and length, passion will not develop. What we speak of is that together with these qualities, the shape of the head and face should also be well-proportioned and harmonic. That is, if the head is large, the face should not be small; the body should be proportionate in every way, and should be neither thin nor fat. She should be taut of skin and her complexion should be of a reddish white or a reddish black, that is, the warm color of wheat; her hands should be well-proportioned and soft, her conversation sweet, her blood hot, her laughter gentle, her smile courteous, and she should be attractive and arousing.

İlke Kamar asks Canan Şenol her understanding of beauty and what the deficiencies of "perfected beauty" by the exercised power are. Şenol replies:

> I produce my artworks mostly on the bio-political concepts. If we evaluate the past and the present from a bio-political perspective—that body is influenced and shaped by the political power—we see that female body is materialized as the object of desire and exposed to strict physical limitations both in the past and the present. One of the most important reasons why I made the series "Perfect Beauty" is that I wanted to show how different are the past definitions of beauty from the present ones.
>
> While slimness is the beauty norm today and thousands of diet products are being produced to promote losing weight, voluptuous women are the ideals of the past. For sure, different dieting options were promoted in the past in order to become plump. If we analyze the past now, the present definitions of beauty lose their effect. Woman's eyebrows and eyes should be black, cheeks red, hands and feet small and body round... Although the two eras have different opposing definitions of beauty when compared, one can see that beauty is defined through the male gaze based on the control over female bodies in both eras. Definitions of beauty are not important only for the social gender policies but also effective on the control that the west applies on the east. I don't think body politics are much different from any other political areas, in fact they feed each other. [94]

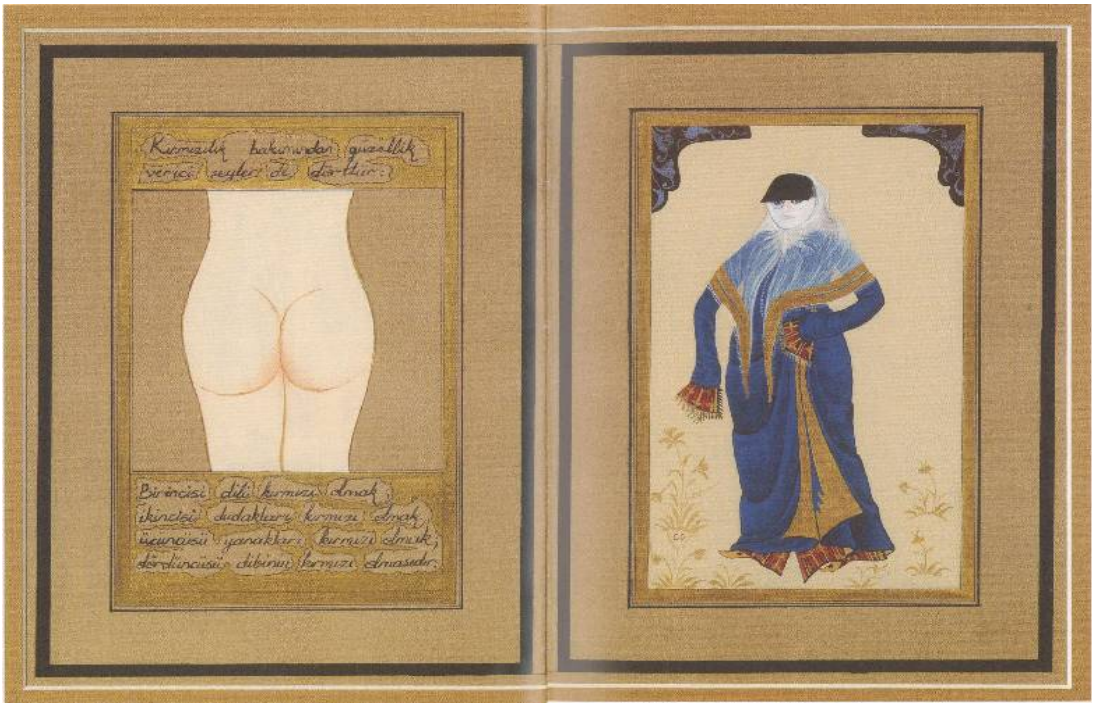


Figure 25: *Perfect Beauty Series – Redness,* mixed media on special paper, 30*50 cm, 2009

Redness (English translation of the text; "*Perfect Beauty* – Canan Şenol" X-ist ex. cat., 2010)

The elements of reddishness that beautify are four as well. The first is a red tongue, the second is red lips, the third is red cheeks and the fourth, a red bottom, that is, reddish buttocks.

[94] Ibid.

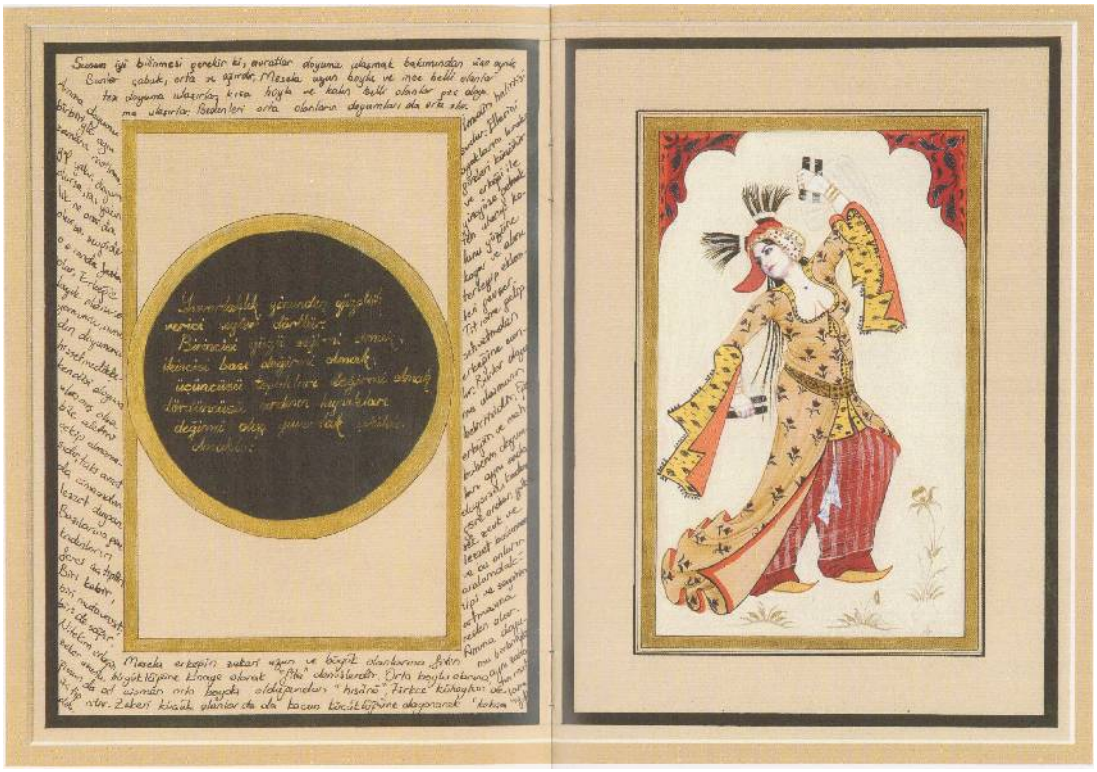


Figure 26: *Perfect Beauty Series – Roundness,* mixed media on special paper, 35*50 cm, 2009

Roundness (English translation of the text; "*Perfect Beauty* – Canan Şenol" X-ist ex. cat., 2010)

There are also four elements of rotundity that produce beauty. The first is the round form of the face, the second roundness of the head, the third is roundness of the heels, and the fourth is the roundness of the buttocks.

It should be well understood that females can be divided into three categories from the standpoint of achieving satisfaction; these are: fast, medium, and slow. For example, females who are tall and narrow-waisted are quickly satisfied, those who are short and thick-waisted are slow to be satisfied, and the satisfaction of those with intermediate bodies is medium. The indication of orgasm is as follows: she relaxes her hands and feet, her eyes become smaller and she is embarrassed to come face to face with the male and covers her face with her arm, her brow perspires and joints loosen, and she begins to tremble and embraces her partner. These are the signs of having achieved satisfaction. If the male and his beloved achieve orgasm at the same moment, he will not find greater pleasure and delectation than the woman, and this will increase the interest and love between them. However, if their satisfaction is not achieved at the same time, but close to one another, the degree of love will be increased proportionately to the degree of closeness. What is worthy and laudable in a male is not to withdraw his tool until he senses that the woman has also been satisfied, even if he has already achieved orgasm, so that she too can savor the pleasure of intercourse.

intermediate (medium), and one is young (small). In fact, we have already spoken of the three types of male organ. For example, if the male organ is long and wide, it is called (with respect to the size of an elephant) fila, or "elephantine". A medium organ, because the horse is of medium size, is referred to as küheylan, or "thoroughbred". And in reference to the small size of a ram, the smaller organ is referred to as kebşa.

Canan Şenol explains her position in feminism as being critical to social gender policies. Her production is not based on sexism, on the opposite she defines it as being against to gender discrimination. “My artworks can in no way be interpreted as women movement.” she says and argues that feminism initially has a critical structure and it has to be based on a political ground and aim to challenge and transform the already settled ideologies and practices. She adds “There is no women movement that can be defined in the realm of feminism unless it stands against sexism as well as it stands all kinds of discrimination; racism, militarism.”[95]

Figure 27: *Perfect Beauty Series – Length,* mixed media on special paper, 35*50 cm, 2009

Length (English translation of the text; “*Perfect Beauty* – Canan Şenol” X-ist ex. cat., 2010)

There are also four elements of length that beautify. The first is a long neck, the second is tall height, the third is long eyebrows, and the fourth is long hair.

With *Perfect Beauty* series Canal Şenol offers a conceptually perfect, multi-layered criticism of changing Turkish definitions of the female body.

[95] Ibid.

Figure 28: *Perfect Beauty Series – Breadth,* mixed media on special paper, 35*50 cm, 2009

Breadth (English translation of the text; "*Perfect Beauty* – Canan Şenol" X-ist ex. cat., 2010)

The elements of breadth that beautify are also four. The first is a broad forehead; the second is wide eyes, that is, not eyes that squint, but rather the eyes of a gazelle; the third is a broad breast, and fourth is a wide and rounded countenance.

2.7 Fat Beauty

Fat has been considered to be beautiful throughout the history. The examples in the first section show that voluptuous women were in fashion since the beginning of the visual history. The oldest woman figure *Venus of Willendorf*, if projected to a life-size scale, might become one of the fattest women one can imagine. Although she is assumed to be a fertility fettish, there is no sign that proves she is not simply a beauty figure to be looked at. Research has proved that fat is more fertile and extreme slimness might result in vanishing fertility, but *Venus of Willendorf* does not just have big breasts and a prominent belly, as opposed to the women of Early Renaissance who appear as if they are pregnant in the paintings, she is obviously and

simply fat. Additional to reproductive reasons, one can argue that fat was something to enjoy looking at in pre-historic times.

In Egyptian art, women become more sophisticated with their looks. They are elegant but in no way bony skinny. They pay more attention to their looks with all the accessories and make-up they wear, but their bodies are still proportionately round. For the Greeks, a fat body lacked the asymmetry of lithe, moving lines that belong to the restless energy of thin. But thin, lacks the noble thickness that lends dignity and a commanding air to the perfect bodies, to the Gods. Aphrodite by today's standards is not thin. Venus de Milo's girth is impressive, although she is proportionate she is not tiny at all.

After paganism, nudes disappear for a long time until the Renaissance. In the late Renaissance—Mannerism—they appear again but in weird proportions of limbs. Kenneth Clark argues the beauty that the mannerist female figures embody "is antinatural; they bear no relation to real women, but only to impossible ideas of women, whose illusion they created. The goddess of mannerism is the eternal feminine of the fashion plate."[96] Top models of today, with their emaciated forms resemble mannerist women in that sense.

In Baroque art, women gain weight again. In *The rape of the daughters of Leukipp*, one can see those luscious fat girls of Ruben's standing for the love of beauty desire to possess, to surround and carry off the whole weight and wealth of human nature. Between Roccoco through Orientalism until modern era it is possible to follow back and forth shifts of fat and thin ideals of female body according to the changing power positions in the society. By the end of nineteenth-century, men settled their corporations and women experienced the exuberance of fat until the first decade of the twentieth-century, when all of a sudden thin became the model of the modern. A model that is persistent for a century now, in which the prejudice against fat seems universal.

Those shifts throughout the history might lead to an assumption that the norms about the body will change again and fat will become the ideal in the future. It is possible to agree with Clark's viewpoint in the sense that body ideals resemble fashion. Because bodies are not just clothes we wear, it is important to break that cycle. Since the late 1960's feminist artists struggling to evoke an awareness about

[96] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 89.

the female bodies and their more than material meaning by standing against the limitations on the body. Whether fat bodies will become favorable again or not, the condemnation towards fatness should be precluded so that women could live their bodies freely in any size. One can foresee that if the pressure to fit in social norms on beauty is removed from women's shoulders, their bodies will convergence their natural sizes.

In that respect, next chapter presents the artworks that I produced on the issues of fat. As a person who experienced obesity, I offer a two-sided conceptual framework of my artworks on fatness. With *Cut this fat off of me!* exhibition, first, I aim to express the ambivalent feelings women have towards their bodies in the context of fat. Second, I try to deconstruct the imposition of slimness in the society.

CHAPTER 3

Body in Transition: *Cut this fat off of me!*

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Cut this fat off of me! is a series of artworks that I produced along my thesis research process. The series is composed of six different artworks on how women perceive their bodies through the eyes of the others and struggle with fatness in different stages of their lives. The series tell the story of a life-time with bodies through the stages; adolescence, adulthood, and senectitude. As I imagine my body in transition through those stages, my subconscious worries about my body turn into critical consciousness on the way. Each stage is presented with two artworks. First artworks in each part are representations of women's troubled experiences with their bodies. Second artworks take a critical approach to the limitations on the body under which women desperately find themselves struggling with imposed ways of weight loss.

Findings of researches that were done on the prevalence of concern about weight and dieting behavior in America in the late 1960's, coinciding with the time of the rise of feminist movement, have shown that age and sex are the most influential differences on the level of concern about weight among the society. Dwyer and Mayer's analysis of several public opinion polls revealed that concerns about weight and dieting behavior were much more common among women than among men. Polls taken in 1956 found that 45 per cent of the women and 22 per cent of the men wanted to lose weight, and that 14 per cent of the women and 7 per cent of the men were currently on diets to do so. Polls in 1966 showed that 42 percent of

the women and 35 per cent of the men interviewed felt that they were over their best weights, and 14 percent of the women and 6 per cent of the men claimed that they were doing something to lose weight. While concern with weight appeared to be rising among the men over time, dieting behavior was not.[97]

Excessive weight deviations tend to be more common among adults than adolescents, yet adults appear to be less concerned about their weights and less apt to take remedial measures that requires patience and determination than teenagers. The studies of Heuenemann et al. indicate that almost all obese and many non-obese adolescents are concerned about weight and they engage in remedial efforts more than adults.[98]

The differences in gender-related concerns about weight relates to the troubles women have in order to fit in some certain norms on the body. The sensitivity of the self-images of females to weight problems encourage them to constantly undertake corrective efforts. It is little wonder that, since women know the importance of their physical appearance particularly in determining how men will regard them as well as in influencing other females' opinions of them, appearance becomes so tightly bound up with self-image. Extra kilos pose a powerful threat to a woman's appearance, and hence generate greater concern and ego involvement in women than men.

Concerning the age difference, due to their recent experience with the dramatic physical changes, brought about by the accelerated growth of puberty, adolescents are more self-conscious about their bodies than are adults. The desire to conform to others and to ideals in weight and appearance is particularly strong during adolescence, probably stronger than it is in adult life. Although the adult women are concerned about their weight, the remedies they prefer are not as strictly applied as the adolescents' level of determination.

Based on the age differences in understanding and handling the fat problem the first artworks *"V"* and *bulimic* under 'Adolescence', conceptualize the process how young girls sensationally become acquainted with their sexuality and their bodies, and with what measures they react to fat. Artworks under 'Adulthood', focuses on the period in which women become more settled with their bodies. *Fighting Fat Cells* and *Lipo* tell the story of stubborn fat cells with a black humor; once they are created

---

[97] J. T. Dwyer and J. Mayer, "Potential dieters: who are they?," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 56 (June 1970): 510-14.

[98] R. L. Huenemann et al., "Adolescent food practices associated with obesity," *Federation Proceedings* 25 (January-February 1966): 8.

and settled in the body, only a professional can suck them out permanently.

My Old Fat PC dramatically represents the psychology of aging, by recognizing slimness as an even more aggressive fashion within technological products' design than it is for the female body. Looking back in time considering all the changes her body went through, *My Old Fat PC* recalls that she was the beauty ideal of her time, she was in fashion. She was a big girl, but she was fit. Now she is ten years old and she has a big belly. Her time has passed, surprisingly fast. The last work under 'Senectitude', *Before/After,* speaks out very directly. The final 'after' is death. Bodies are confined to perish. The whole fuss about them turns out to be meaningless and useless in the end.

2.2 Artworks

Below are the photographs of each artwork that were exhibited in my graduation exhibition *Cut this fat off of me!* opened on the 4th of August 2010. The exhibition took place at Sabancı University Social Sciences Faculty stairwell. The artworks below follow the order; *"V"*, *bulimic*, *Fighting Fat Cells*, *Lipo*, *My Old Fat PC*, and finally *before/after*. All the works are presented with images on their final stages, as well as with details.

-Adolescence-

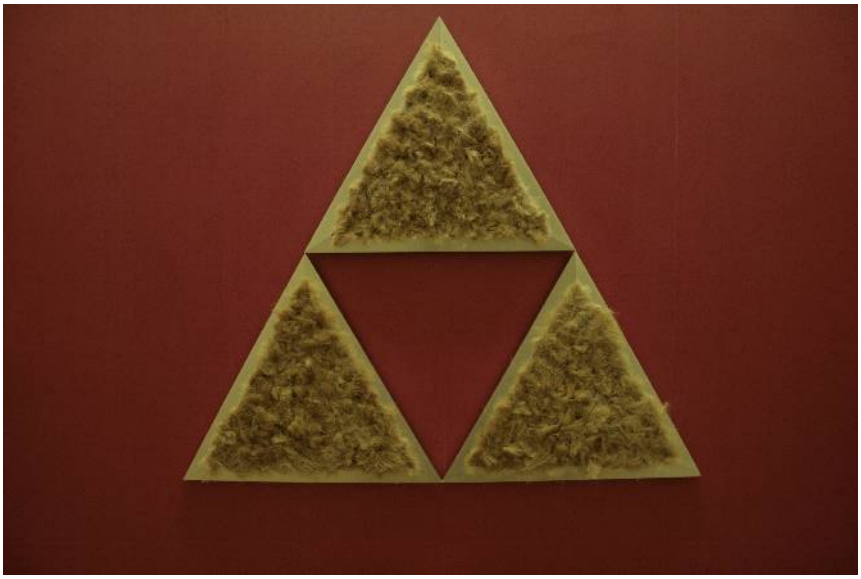


Figure 29: *"V"*, Pelin Güre, 2008, 3*60 cm equilateral aluminum triangle frames filled with tow

Figure 30: Detail, *"V"*, Pelin Güre, 2008

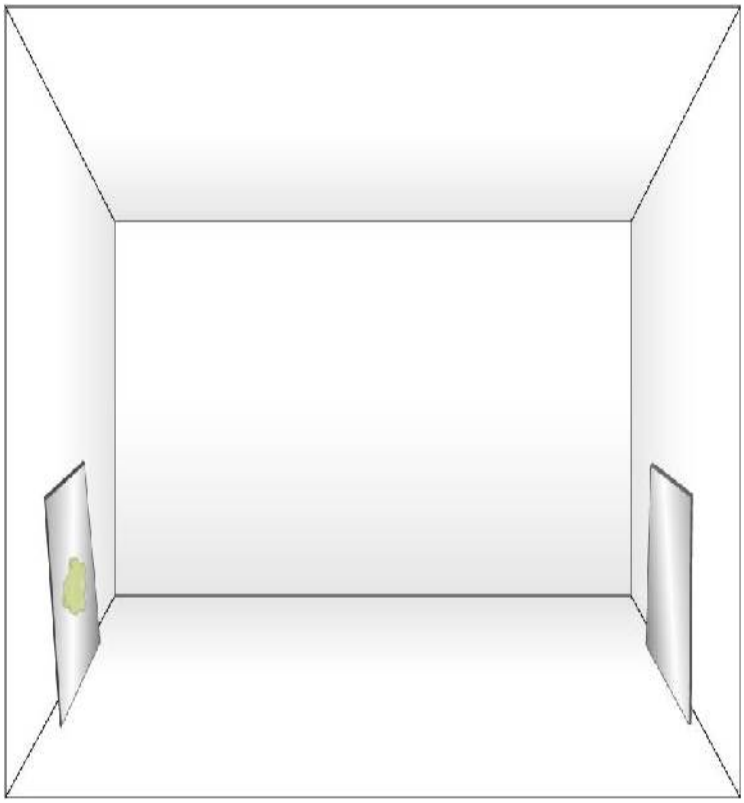


Figure 31: *bulimic*, Pelin Güre, installation, 2010
2 mirrors 60*90 cm placed across each other in the toilet with one of them partly covered with puke and a sound installation of vomiting sounds

Figure 32: *bulimic*, Pelin Güre, installation, 2010

Figure 33: Detail, *bulimic*, Pelin Güre, 2010

Figure 34: Detail, *bulimic*, Pelin Güre, 2010

-Adulthood-

Figure 35: *Fighting Fat Cells*, Pelin Güre, 2010

2 cylinders of cacao and coconut marshmallow cakes placed on an abstract female body shaped wooden platform, and nails

Figure 36: *Fighting Fat Cells,* Pelin Güre, 2010

Figure 37: Detail, *Fighting Fat Cells*, Pelin Güre, 2010

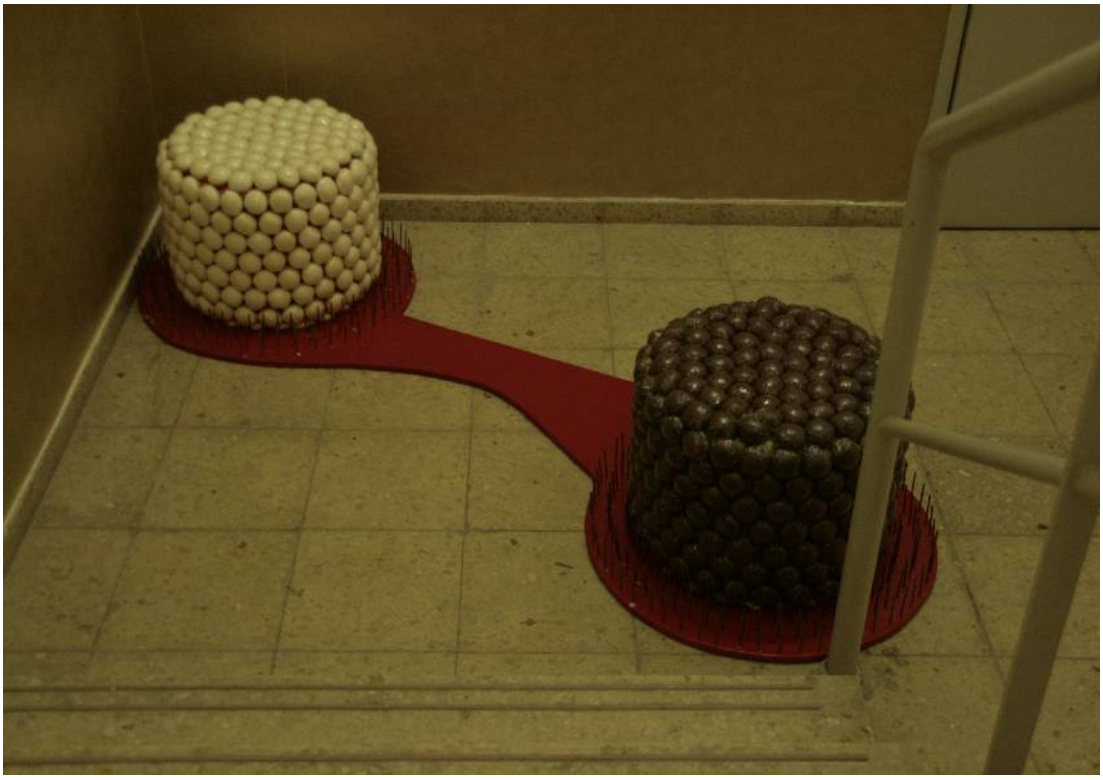


Figure 38: *Fighting Fat Cells*, Pelin Güre, 2010

Figure 39: *Fighting Fat Cells*, Pelin Güre, 2010

Figure 40: *Lipo*, Pelin Güre, mixed media on photograph, 2010

Figure 41: Detail, *Lipo*, Pelin Güre, 2010

Figure 42: *My Old Fat PC*, Pelin Güre, installation, 2009, PC with a belly shaped glass screen in front of a wooden toilette mirror, and cosmetic accessories

Figure 43: Detail, *My Old Fat PC*, Pelin Güre, 2009

Figure 44: Detail, *My Old Fat PC,* Pelin Güre, 2009

Figure 45: Detail, *My Old Fat PC*, Pelin Güre, 2009

Figure 46: *Before/After*, Pelin Güre, mixed media on photography, 2010

Figure 47: *Before/After,* Pelin Güre, mixed media on photography, 2010

2.3 Visual Model

The theories of the subject as decentered in contemporary arts, which proliferate in the 1970's, seek to provide an alternative to the idea of the viewer implicit in Renaissance perspective that is a centered, coherent, and humanist subject. Post-structuralist theories argue that each person is intrinsically dislocated with him or herself. In other words, post-structural theory states that the correct way in which to view our condition as human subjects is first as fragmented, by unconscious desires and anxieties, second as multiple, by an independent and differential relationship to the world, and third as decentered, by pre-existing social structures. This discourse of decentering has had particular influence on feminist artists, who argue that fantasies of 'centering' perpetuated by dominant ideology are masculinist, and conservative.

Starting from 1965 until the beginning of the 1980's, ideas of heightened immediacy, of the decentered subject, and of 'activated spectatorship' as political in implication came into focus in installation art. 'Activated Spectatorship' in installation art is a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as 'theatrical', 'immersive' or 'experiential'.[99] Dan Graham in 1978 noted that 1960's art was 'a new form of Kantian idealism' in which the isolated spectator's subjective consciousness-in-itself replaces the art object to be perceived-for-itself; his/her perception is the product of the art.[100]

In *Cut this fat off of me!*, I attempt to engender a kind of activated spectatorship, by exhibiting my works in an alternative space—stairwell—which extends the conventions of museum practice and offering the viewer a more isolated and immersive space. Although different in form, Barbara Kruger's installation *All violence is the illustration of a pathetic stereotype* sets a famous example for such an immersive space used in order not only to create a physical interaction of the viewer and the artworks, but also to engage them in a conversation.

---

[99] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 102.

[100] Dan Graham, "Public Space/Two Audiences," in T*wo Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham*, ed. Alexander Alberro, (Cambrige: The MIT Press, 1999), 157.

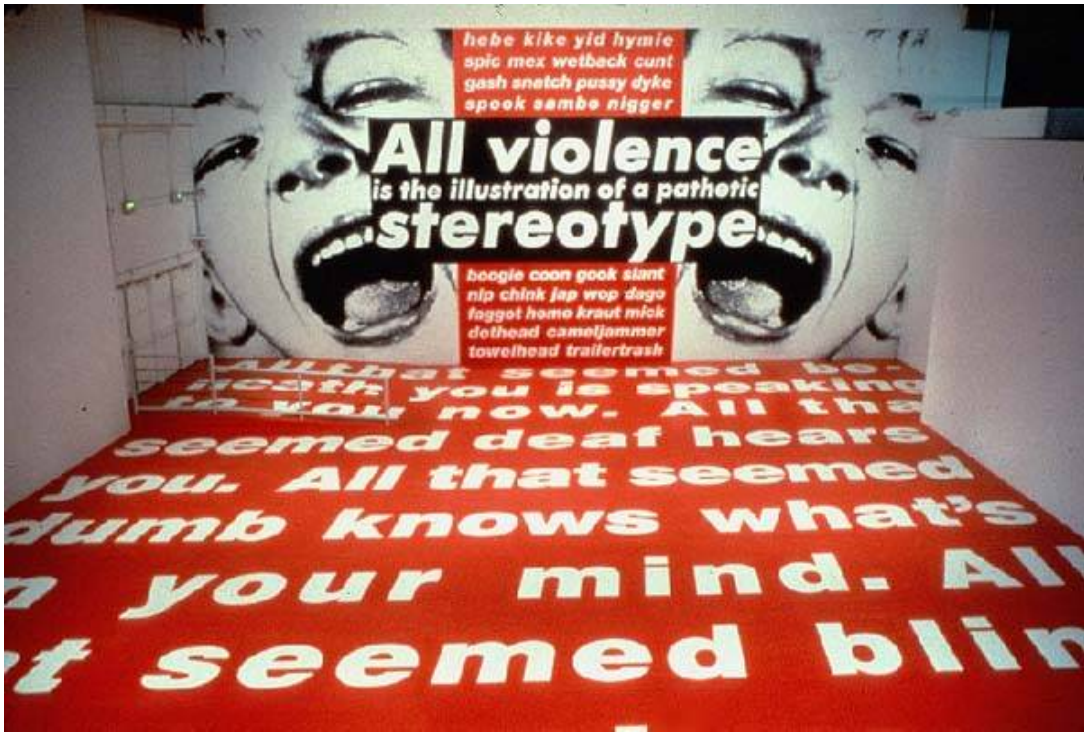


Figure 29: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled* (*All violence is the illustration of a pathetic stereotype)*, installation, 1991

In a similar sense, *Cut this fat off of me!* conceives of its viewing subject not as an individual who experience art in transcendent or existential isolation, but as part of a collective community and memory.

One last significant visual influence to note appears in the work *Lipo* in the exhibition as a homage to Kruger, using the trademark of her overlaid photographs with declarative captions in white-on-red Futura Bold Oblique. I admire Kruger's works not only because of her use of the space, but also the language she speaks with through her artworks. Much of Kruger's work engages the merging of found photographs from existing sources with pithy and aggressive text that involves the viewer in the struggle for power and control that her captions speak to. Reminding the viewer the collective community he/she belongs to, her works speak to the viewer using pronouns such as "you", "your", "I", "we", and "they".

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed at drawing the conceptual and visual framework of my exhibition *Cut this fat off of me!* The exhibition is composed of six artworks that address the issues of female bodies concerning fat. As a person who experienced fat to the extremes for more than ten years, my artworks question the issue on a social level by focusing on the personal. Our bodies signify the limits of our existence, and these limits are most of the time socially constructed.

This first chapter presented different approaches on how one forms the first understandings of his/her body. The importance of perception is emphasized in the process of how self image is created through the image of the other. The role of the ego in maintaining a healthy relationship between the physical and ideal experiences of oneself is examined. Followed by a brief medical history of the theories on the causes of corpulence, the physical and psychological effects of remedies, such as dieting, are investigated.

Three important conclusions were drawn in the first chapter. First, the science does not support the dominant convictions about the facts and the causes of an obesity pandemic. Causes of palatability remains as a question in between the interactions with the environment and pure instinct. Second, psychoanalytic theory proves that the body is libidinally invested, so one always has a love and hate relationship with his/her body. Unless the repressed feelings that a person has about his/her body are relieved in order to gain consciousness and reduce the extremities of the libidinal relationship with the body, the solutions that are offered in the market will keep making the problem worse. It is a fact that dieting makes more people fat and it has unhealthy side effects. A purely physical understanding of corporeal existence is the underlying reason why applied remedies such as dieting do not turn

out to be helpful in the long run. Instead of defining corporeality as purely physical, theories that support the idea of a 'common body' are presented. Those theories redefine corporeal existence as a personal level of bodily existence in which one can distinguish her body from the others, but beneath that personal level is another level of existence in which there is a commonality between and a quasi-indifferentiation from other bodies. For the fat person cannot meet that commonality on one level, stigma occurs and social exclusion is the result. Public policies are devised to 'protect' fat people from their own bad habits, thereby protecting society from their irresponsible behavior as well. Just like other risk discourses, the one on obesity revolves around power and control relationships between different social interests. Finally, it is argued that as the medical science and the public policies produce and legitimize discriminatory practices and coincide with the dominant cultural prejudice against overweight people, claiming that being lean is good for one's health and being fat is not only bad for one's health but also socially and economically irresponsible.

The process how one becomes fat and the ways in which he/she deals with it is a highly visual process. The process is both affected by the visuality surrounding one and it proceeds with such a strong visual change in itself that in the end affects society. Whereas once fat had positive connotations of social, economic and sexual well-being, now the reverse is true. Present cultural preferences make thinness the ideal of beauty and discriminate against fat. In the line of the argument, the second chapter's focus was on the visual representations of body image by looking at examples of different body ideals throughout the history. All the dominating art movements of the past centuries are presented briefly in the first section in order to follow the changes that different economic, cultural, and artistic movements brought to the perception of human body forms, and how those perceptions were reflected in sculptures and paintings of their times.

The following sections presented a specific theoretical analysis of the 1970's and 80's on the important theories and women's critical standpoint in art production especially concerning the female body. Art that focused directly on issues of the body as a theme surfaced dramatically in the late 1960's and 1970's in art by women artists that was inspired by the activism of political movement for women's rights. Women artists opposing the dominant male gaze in the female body representations engaged in creating a female image independent of the male gaze. 'Women only'

exhibitions were held in which a number of women artists' works were presented. Female bodies in those artworks appeared as independent and strong to oppose the position of women in the social structure that was regarded as passive. Later, in the beginning of 1980's, a second-generation of women artists argued that the efforts to create a new female sensibility were supporting the gender-discriminative policies. Total exclusion of the male gaze from the female body representations were considered to be rather utopic than outlining the real. Those artists suggested a deconstructive approach to challenge the limitations on the female body instead of constructing 'women only' ones.

Following the feminist perspectives on the female body, contemporary Turkish feminist artist Canan Şenol's series of seven works, *Perfect Beauty,* analysis provided a conceptually and visually strong example for feminist art production. Şenol, in her series, makes visible the Ottoman understanding of female beauty with the miniatures she uses. The texts in the artworks based on the words of the 'sagacious' men of the empire give definitions of beauty of the Ottoman times. While she criticizes the dominance of the male gaze on female beauty with her series, she also points out the differences between Turkish beauty ideals of the past and the present.

The main conclusion to be drawn from the second chapter is explained in the last part 'fat beauty'. The beauty ideals concerning the female body has changed many times within the history and plump women were represented most of the time as the ideals. Based on the changing role of women since the modern times, unnatural and extreme slimness became the new ideal. If the present social constructions on the body change, the ideals of beauty will change again. Instead of introducing fat beauty as the next fashion to replace slimness, it is argued that the driving forces that direct societies to such obsessions on the body should be addressed in order to create a female awareness on the body politics. Women artists of the 1970's and 80's played a significant role in the process of starting the change on perceptions of the female body by becoming actively involved in theoretical and artistic production processes.

Based on the interaction of the two different theories, psychoanalytic and feminist, explained in the first two chapters, *Cut this fat off of me!* acknowledges women's troubles with their self image from a psychoanalytic approach and attempts to deconstruct the ways with which the mediated ideal body image operates. In order to do so, I benefited from the visual structure of 'Activated Spectatorship' in

installation art in my curatorial approach. 'Activated Spectatoship' in installation art is a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as 'theatrical', 'immersive' or 'experiential'. By exhibiting my works in a dorm room at Sabancı University, a space which extends the conventions of museum practice, I offer the viewer a more isolated and immersive space in which s/he can engage in a conversation with the artworks.

REFERENCES

Alsop, J. "Warriors From A Watery Grave." *National Geographic* 163 (1983): 820-27.

Artchive. Amedeo Modigliani. www.artchive.com/artchive/M/modigliani.html. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Artmovements. Expressionism. www.artmovements.co.uk/expressionism.htm. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Basham, Patrick, Gio Gori, and John Luik. *Diet Nation: Exposing the Obesity Crusade*. London: The Social Affairs Unit, 2006.

Baucom, D. H., and P. A. Aiken. "Effect of depressed mood on eating among obese and nonobese dieting and nondieting persons." *Journal* of *Personality and Social Psychology* 41 (1981): 577-85.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing.* United Kingdom: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008.

BirGün Gazetesi. "Kedilerin de bıyıkları vardır." Translated by Pelin Güre. http://www.birgun.net/culture_index.php?news_code=1264597572&year=2010&month=01&day=27 (accessed 19 June, 2010).

Bishop, Claire. *Installation Art.* New York: Routledge, 2005.

Boime, Albert. *Art in an Age of Bonapartism, 1800-1815*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of Claifornia Press, 1993.

Brooklyn Museum. "Canan Şenol." http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/canan_senol.php (accessed 19 June, 2010).

Butler, Judith. "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault." In *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*. Edited by Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer. New York: Longman, 1998.

Clark, Kenneth. *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956.

Cusumano, Dale L., and J. Kevin Thompson. “Body Image and Body Shape Ideals in Magazines: Exposure, Awareness, and Internalization.” *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 37 (1997): 701-21.

Duke Visual Studies. “Barbara Kruger: All violence is the illustration of a pathetic stereotype.” http://www.dukevisualstudies.org/artsvis54/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/12am1971 (accessed 25 June, 2010).

Duncan, Carol. “The Esthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art.” *Heresies* 1 (1977): 46-50.

Dwyer, J. T., and J. Mayer. “Potential dieters: who are they?.” *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 56 (June 1970): 510-14.

Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Foucault, Michel. *The history of sexuality*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New york: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Freud, Sigmund. *Standart Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Edited and translated by J. Strachey, A. Freud, A. Strachey, and A. Tyson. London: Hogarth, 1955.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Gornick, Vivian. “Toward a Definition of Female Sensibility.” In *Essays in Feminism.* New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

Gouma-Peterson, Thalia, and Patricia Mathews. “The Feminist Critique of Art History.” *The Art Bulletin* 69, No. 3 (1987): 326-57.

Graham, Dan. “Public Space/Two Audiences,” In *Two Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham.* Edited by Alexander Alberro. Cambrige: The MIT Press, 1999.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists.* Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1989.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism.* Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Hammond, Harmony. “A Sense of Touch.” *New Art Examiner* (Summer 1979): 75-81.

Held, Julius S. “On the Date and Function of Some Allegorical Sketches by Rubens.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 38 (1975): 218–33.

Huenemann, R. L., M. C. Hampton, L. R. Shapiro, and A. Behnke. “Adolescent food practices associated with obesity.” *Federation Proceedings* 25 (January-February 1966): 4-10.

Johnson, Ellen H. “Alice Neel's Fifty Years of Portrait Painting.” *Studio International.* Vol. 193, No. 987 (March 1977): 175-79.

Kelly, Mary. “No Essential Femininity: A Conversation between Mary Kelly and Paul Smith.” *Parachute* 26 (Spring 1982): 27-42.

Klein, Richard. *Eat Fat*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1996.

Kristeva, Julia. “Women's Time.” In *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology.* Edited by Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982.

LeBesco, Kathleen. *Revolting Bodies: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004.

Leon, G. R., and L. Roth. “Obesity: Causes, correlations, and speculations.” *Psychological Bulletin* 84 (1977): 117-39.

Licht, Fred. *Goya: The Origins of the Modern Temper in Art*. New York: Universe Books, 1979.

Lilith Galery. “Amadeo Modigliani, Reclining Female Nude.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Amadeo-Modigliani-Reclining-Female-Nude.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Ankhesenamun, Wife of Pharaoh Tut.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Ankhesenamun.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Aphrodite Kallipygos.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Aphrodite-Kallipygos.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “At the Moulin Rouge.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/At-the-Moulin-Rouge.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Galery. “Beckmann, Dancing in Baden Baden.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Beckmann-Dancing-in-Baden-Baden.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Birth of Venus.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Birth-of-Venus.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Caroline Bookpaintry, Adam and Eve.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Caroline-Bookpaintry-

Adam-and-Eve.gif. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Diamond Mine.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Diamond-Mine.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Ferdinand Hodler, The Day II, 1905.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Ferdinand-Hodler-The-Day-II-1905.gif. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Francisco Goya, The Two Mayas.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Francisco-Goya-The-Two-Mayas.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “ Jacob Jordaens, The Wife of King Kandaules.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Jacob-Jordaens-The-Wife-of-King-Kandaules-1646.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Jupiter and Thetis.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Jupiter-and-Thetis.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Sleeping Venus.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Sleeping-Venus.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “The Turkish Bath.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/The-Turkish-Bath-1862.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “ Trés riches heures: Paradise.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Tres-riches-heures-Paradise.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Venus de Milo.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Venus-de-Milo.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Venus of Willendorf.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Venus-of-Willendorf.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Vitruvian Man.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Vitruvian-Man.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lilith Gallery. “Warrior of Riace.” http://www.lilithgallery.com/arthistory/european/images/Warrior-of-Riace.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Lippard, Lucy. “Sexual Politics: Art Style.” In *From the Center Feminist Essays in Women's Art.* Edited by Lucy Lippard. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1976.
Louvre Museum. “The Turkish Bath.” http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226335&CURRENT_LLV_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226335&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500815&bmLocale=en (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Maddox, George L., Kurt W. Back, and Veronica R. Liederman. “Overweight as Social Deviance and Disability.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 9 (December 1968): 287-98.

Mela, D. J. **“**Implications of fat replacement for nutrition and food intake.” *European Journal of Medical Research* 1 (1995): 78-83.

Newburgh, L. H. “Obesity.” In *Clinical Nutrition.* Edited by N. Jolliffe, F. F. Tisdall and P. R. Cannon. New York: Paul B. Hoeber Inc, 1950.

Nisbett, R. E. “Hunger, obesity, and the ventromedial hypothalamus.” *Psychology Reviews* 79 (1972): 433-53.

Nochlin, Linda. *Woman as Sex Object. Studies in Erotic Art 1730-1970.* Edited by Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin. New York: Newsweek Inc., 1972.

Oliver, J. Eric. *Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America’s Obesity Epidemic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Orbach, Susie. *Fat Is a Feminist Issue: The Anti-Diet Guide for Women*. New York: Galahad Books, 1997.

Orenstein, Gloria. “Review Essay: Art History.” *Signs* 1 (1975): 505-25.

Peter Paul Rubens. “Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus.” http://www.peterpaulrubens.org/Rape-of-the-Daughters-of-Leucippus-c.-1617.jpg. (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Plato. The Republic. United Kingdom: Penguin Books Ltd., 2007.

Polivy, J. “Perception of calories and regulation of intake in restrained and unrestrained subjects.” *Addictive Behaviors* 1 (1976): 237-43.

Robertson, Jean, and Craig McDaniel, *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art After 1980.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Sadoff, Dianne F. *Sciences of the Flesh: Representing Body and Subject in Psychoanalysis.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Schachter, S. “Some extraordinary facts about obese humans and rats.” *American Psychologist* 26 (1971): 129-44.

Schachter, S., and J. Rodin. *Obese Humans and Rats.* Washington, DC: ErlbaudHalsted, 1974.
Schapiro, Miriam. "The Education of Women as Artists: Project Womanhouse." *Art Journal* 31 (1972): 268-70.

Showalter, Elaine. "Toward a Feminist Poetics." In *The New Feminist Criticism.* Edited by Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon, 1985.

Simoes, E. J., T. Byers, R. J. Coates, M. K. Serdula, A. H. Mokdad, and G. W. Heath. "The association between leisure-time physical activity and dietary fat in American adults." *American Journal of Public Health* 85 (1995): 240-44.

South, Helen. Excerpt from the *Ten Books of Architecture by Vitruvius Polio.* http://drawsketch.about.com/od/leonardodavincidrawings/a/vitruviusman.htm (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Spitzer, L. and J. Rodin. "Human eating behavior: A critical review of studies in normal weight and overweight individuals." *Appetite* 2 (1981): 293-329.

Squid Who is Ankhesenamun. "Ankhesenamun-Tutankhamun's Wife." Squid Who. http://www.squidoo.com/ankhesenamun (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Stearns, Peter. *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

Sullivan, Shannon. *Living across and through Skins*: *Transactional Bodies*, *Pragmatism and Feminism.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Şenol, Canan. "Perfect Beauty." Exhibition catalogue. İstanbul: Galery X-ist, 2010.

Tickner, Lisa. "Sexuality and/ in Representation: Five British Artists." *Difference On Representation and Sexuality.* Exhibition catalogue. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

Tickner, Lisa. "The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970." *Art History* 1 (1978): 236-42.

Tucker, Marcia. *Lee Krasner: Large Paintings*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1973.

Turkish Culture Foundation. "Canan Şenol." http://www.turkishculture.org/whoiswho/visual-arts/canan-senol-1178.htm (accessed 19 June, 2010).

University of Chicago Humanities. "Les trés riches heures du Duc de Berry." University of Chicago. http://humanities.uchicago.edu/images/heures/heures.html (accessed 12 June, 2010).

von Noorden, C. *Metabolism and Practical Medicine.* Chicago: W. T. Keener, 1907.

Wagner, Monique. *From Gaul to De Gaulle: An Outline of French Civilization.* New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
Wardle, J. "Compulsive eating and dietary restraint." *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 26 (1987): 47-55.

Weinstock, Jane. "A Lass, A Laugh and a Lad." *Art in America* (Summer 1983): 7-11.

Winstead, Barbara A. "Body Image, Physical Attractiveness, and Depression." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 53 (Feb 1985): 88-94.

Witcombe, Christopher L. C. E. "Women in Prehistory: The Venus of Willendorf." *Images of Women in Ancient Art.* 2003. http://witcombe.sbc.edu/willendorf/willendorfdiscovery.html (accessed 12 June, 2010)

Witcombe, Christopher L. C. E. "Women in Prehistory: Woman from Willendorf." *Images of Women in Ancient Art.* 2003. http://witcombe.sbc.edu/willendorf/willendorfwoman.html (accessed 12 June, 2010).

Appendix A

Cut this fat off of me! Studio Work Photo Gallery

Studio Work

Fighting Fat

Studio Work

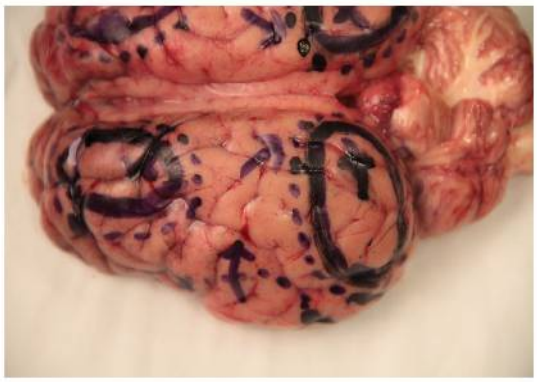
Fighting Fat

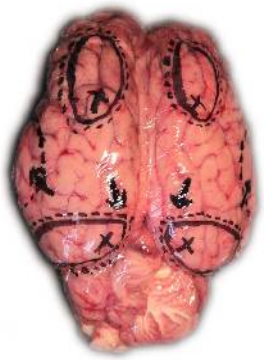
Studio Work

Fighting Fat

Studio Work

Lipo



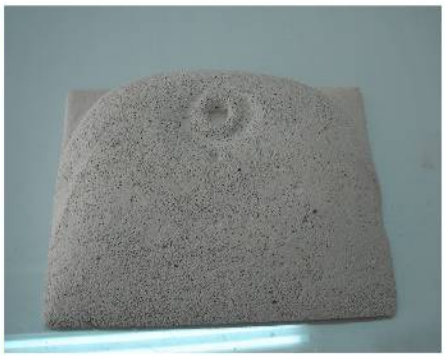


Studio Work

Lipo

Studio Work (Zümrüt Glass Atelier)

My Old Fat PC



Studio Work (Kocaeli University Cadaver Room)

Before/After

Appendix B

art.homes Project: *Is this my Culture?*

art.homes is an art project which aims at promoting young artists from Munich and Istanbul. Ten artists from Munich and ten from Istanbul will meet and be paired up to share and make use of 10 apartments in Istanbul (November 2010) and in Munich (August 2011). The artists are supposed to respond to the specific spatial situation of each apartment and work there experimentally, so that everyday homes will be transformed into art laboratories. Their art-in-progress will also be accessible to the public for the duration of 10 days.

art.homes pursues an experimental concept of exhibition: the limits of art and the artists themselves are to be tested and exhausted. The artists, coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds must, first virtually, let their ideas of space-specific work react to one another and then, in reality, channel them into a common use of the apartment. This implies necessary compromises that go beyond traditional artistic collaboration.

http://www.art-homes.de/english/

Below, you can see my project proposal that was selected. *Is this my Culture?* is a culinary performance piece with which I take my thesis topic one step forward and experiment on the visual codes of food in a cultural dialog.

Title: IS THIS MY CULTURE?: A Culinary Experiment

Description: My mother was working intensely, that is why I don't remember her cooking for us very often. I spent my childhood eating fast-food outside home. I turned out to be obese when I was 18. To resolve my fat problem I tried every possible way including a surgical operation and visits to a fat camp. None of those attempts could help me lose weight. After I left home for college I started losing weight on a slow pace, but constantly. Then I realized, it was the outcome of the fact that I was responsible for my own cooking from that time on.

Cooking and eating habits are among the most important signifiers of a culture. I have been working on my master's thesis on eating disorders, fat and their visual representation for a while now. Since food, and all that is associated with it, is already larger than life, I am focusing on what disgusts people about food and fat.

As a result of my personal interest in the area, I have been cooking experimentally whenever I had the chance to feed a crowd. Since cooking is a performative act in itself, *Is This My Culture?* is a performance piece in which I will be cooking the meals of a specific menu everyday throughout the exhibition. What is on the menu is rather visually disgusting for most of the people as I have come to realize while I was searching the recipes on-line, but quite tasty contrary to their reputation: smoked sheep heads, giblets, offal, viscera, brain and intestines. For example, tripe soup is one of the most famous soups of Turkish culinary culture but I have not seen or heard anyone cooking it at home. These kind of meals are restaurant-specific meals and by cooking them at home I would also like to meet and experience that part of my culture not only by the taste but also visually. I will be documenting all the process starting from the shopping at the butcher to the serving and enjoying the meal part everyday. The photographs, comments and all the documents I collect will be presented on a board next to the dining table throughout the exhibition.