

PAT BRASSINGTON
À REBOURS

ACCA EDUCATION



Much of contemporary photography seems haunted by the past- by the history of art, by memories that are re-made in artworks, our returning to family albums and by our delving into what drives us which returns us to the development of psychoanalysis and through it to the art movement of Surrealism.

A Rebours is a major survey by one of Australia's most important and influential photo-based artists. Pat Brassington.

As we enter the 4 salon rooms set up by ACCA we are put into a world of "wonder" and from this many questions arise.

The Title- A Rebours - Speculate why the artist chose this title.

The old French word rebours has no equivalent noun in English; it refers to the opposite direction of a fabric's nap. Today rebours survives only in the expression à rebours, which literally means, "Against the nap," but is also used figuratively to mean, "backwards, wrong way or against the grain".

There was a banned 1884 French novel titled A Rebours by Joris-Karl Huysmans.

The Artist

Pat Brassington went to art school as a mature-aged student. Now one of Australia's leading photo-media artists, she lives and works in Tasmania where she's been producing images for 32 years. In the 1980's and early 1990's Brassington worked primarily with black and white photographic media after having studied printmaking alongside photography at art school.

When we look at her work produced during the next 30 years we see these recurring motifs; interior and domestic spaces and strange bodily mutations that take place within the human, predominantly female, form. The possible psychological readings of these are dark with a sometimes-wry black sense of humour.

The label **Post Modernist** suits her well. She appropriates imagery and engages with the reproducibility of the medium. She uses historical

material as "quotation" in a playful and/or critical way. However, some would argue that she is more tied to the collage tradition of artists like Hannah Hoch.

What has influenced her?

Pat Brassington has an active interest in contemporary art and her field of influences is extensive. She has been inspired by both contemporary art and the aesthetic qualities of early historical photographic work. The artist is a fan of classic black and white cinema and cites the work of Alfred Hitchcock in particular. Brassington says of Hitchcock's work "Although I did quite take off on the psycho drama- I was more interested in the psychology and the strangeness of Hitchcock's films."

With clues of taped over mouths, oral emissions, gashes, allusions to genitalia, stretched and curled feet and stretched tights It is inevitable with Brassington's work we want to look at her precursors when it comes to explorations of the unconscious. The Surrealists, in both their literature and their art, pushed for the liberation of the unconscious and aimed to mingle reason with dreams and chance effects to create imagery. One is reminded of the work of the early surrealists when looking at Brassington's work; the spooky photography and fetishistic doll making of Hans Bellmer and the writing of Georges Bataille and Sigmund Freud.

'I have long been interested in psychoanalysis and have been intrigued also by strategies used by some Surrealists. If I add these influences to my own life experience I

come as close as I can to providing a rationale for my images of fantasy.'

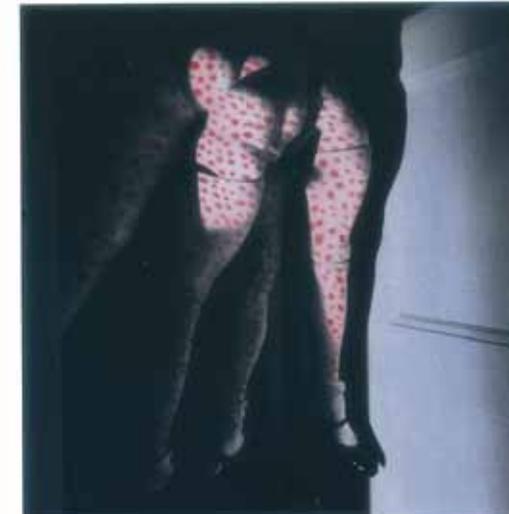
"Year's ago I read Freud's Totem and Taboo," Brassington says. "If I think about it, it must have been a catalyst for me in some ways. It was Freud's musings on 'the unconscious' and the 'return of the repressed' that fuelled my desire to probe into some aspects of surrealist practice". "The fascination is still with me. It's not that I want to travel down the same road, but it is a lantern in the window."

The Surrealist Movement was pretty much a masculine movement. Pat Brassington's images subtly and gently subvert, or undermine what we are used to seeing as surrealist images giving us an eerie sensuality which is both humorous and provocative and with fugitive feminist associations. Her reading of feminist text is extensive.

When recently asked about her influences she responded "Ideas. Ideas that come from life's experiences, from family and friends, the ideas embodied in the vast array of exhibited and published visual artworks. Literature, cinema and music, the natural world and human nature. There is a moving feast of artist's works that passes through one's consciousness. Here are a few from the past that popped into my head as I write: Goya, Giacometti, Fuseli, Magritte, Ernst, Hoch, Hesse, Bourgeois...."



Hans Bellmer, La Poupee, 1936



Hans Bellmer, Seconde Parte, 1936



Pat Brassington, 1 + 1 = 3, 1984

Processes and Techniques

In creating a work, Pat Brassington often draws on her personal archive of negatives and black and white prints, occasionally incorporating a scanned found image or reaching for the camera if she doesn't have what she wants. She often groups images together for narrative.

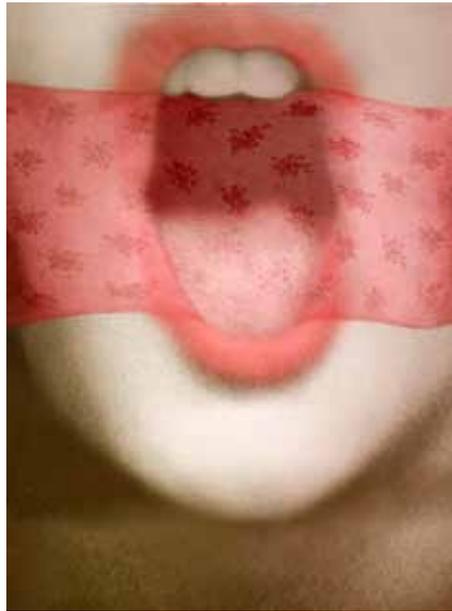
In her early work taken with film and printed on silver gelatin paper we see wonderfully naturally lit nudes with sinister glows near doorways as well as series that suggest multiple readings.

In the 1990s she abandoned more traditional approaches in order to pursue digital manipulation. Making use of the potential dismemberment and radical re-arrangements of the digital medium freed the photographer from any sense of the real and allowed her imagination to triumph. In "By The Way" note the cutting and pasting of a portion of fabric from the dress to make the headpiece.



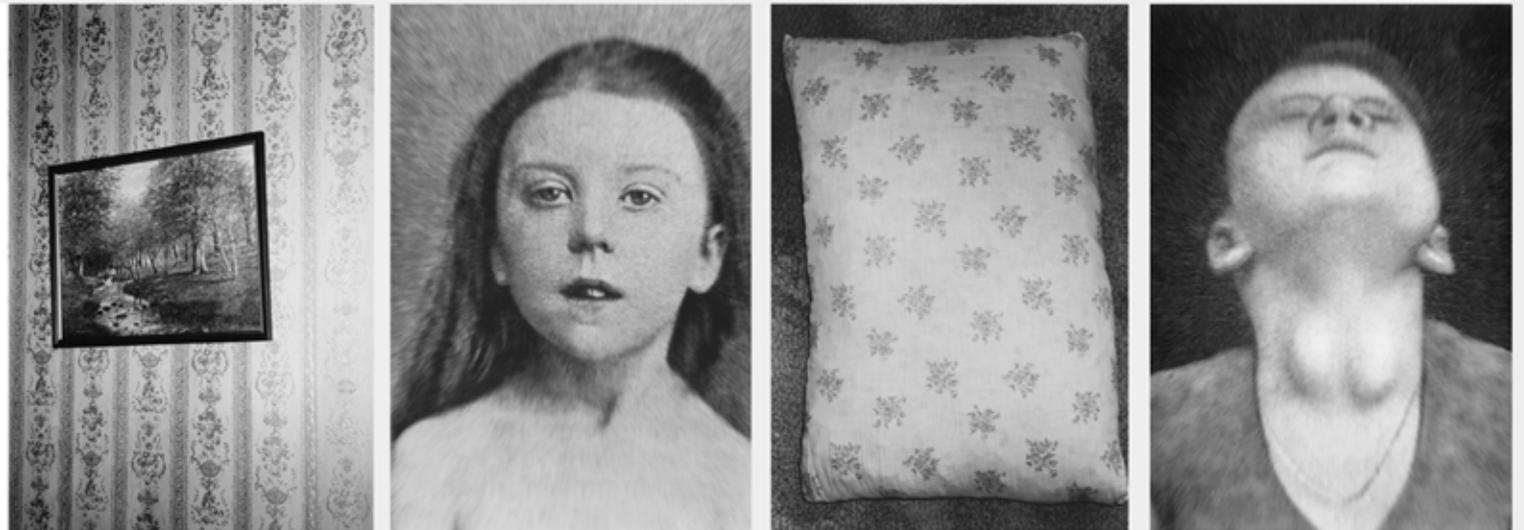
Pat Brassington, By The Way, 2010

'In My Mother's House' 1994 comprises four images that, typical to Brassington's practice are drawn from existing images – either found photographs or from personal collections that are then altered, with new, often disturbingly eccentric, images emerging. In this work Brassington uses images taken by herself in her late mother's home, combined with portraits of young goitre sufferers from an old medical text. A pillow is a recurring motif in her work. We are left to consider these images as equal components in an intriguing and silent narrative. We act as detectives linking images like clues, searching for answers to resolve the mystery.



Note how Pat Brassington has made the same fabric from the pillow in 'In My Mother's House' transparent to create a gag in "Forget Your Perfect". The curator has placed these works opposite one another so that you can make these connections.

Forget Your Perfect, 2008



Pat Brassington, In My Mother's House, 1994

In *Below Stairs* 2009 we are reminded of how Max Ernst in 'Dreaming with Open Eyes' -1933 used domestic interiors of wallpapered rooms for dramatic settings. Such surrealist images have inspired Pat Brassington.

In the first of Brassington's images we see a woman who could be the artist herself, turned away from us.

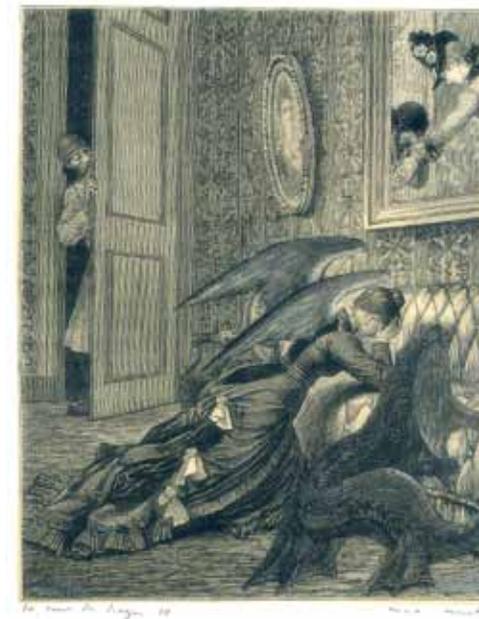
A child is in the second image and a repellant x-rayed rat is in the third. The trap door is open in these 2 images. Why isn't it there in the first picture? Did she finally get rid of the memory and is she walking away having put a lid on it? Many readings are possible with these contemporary works.

In the 1990s she abandoned more traditional analogue photography in order to pursue digital manipulation in large colour images. She continued to work with similar motifs to her early black and white work e.g. cut off legs, strapped bodies, silenced children, old interiors where things,

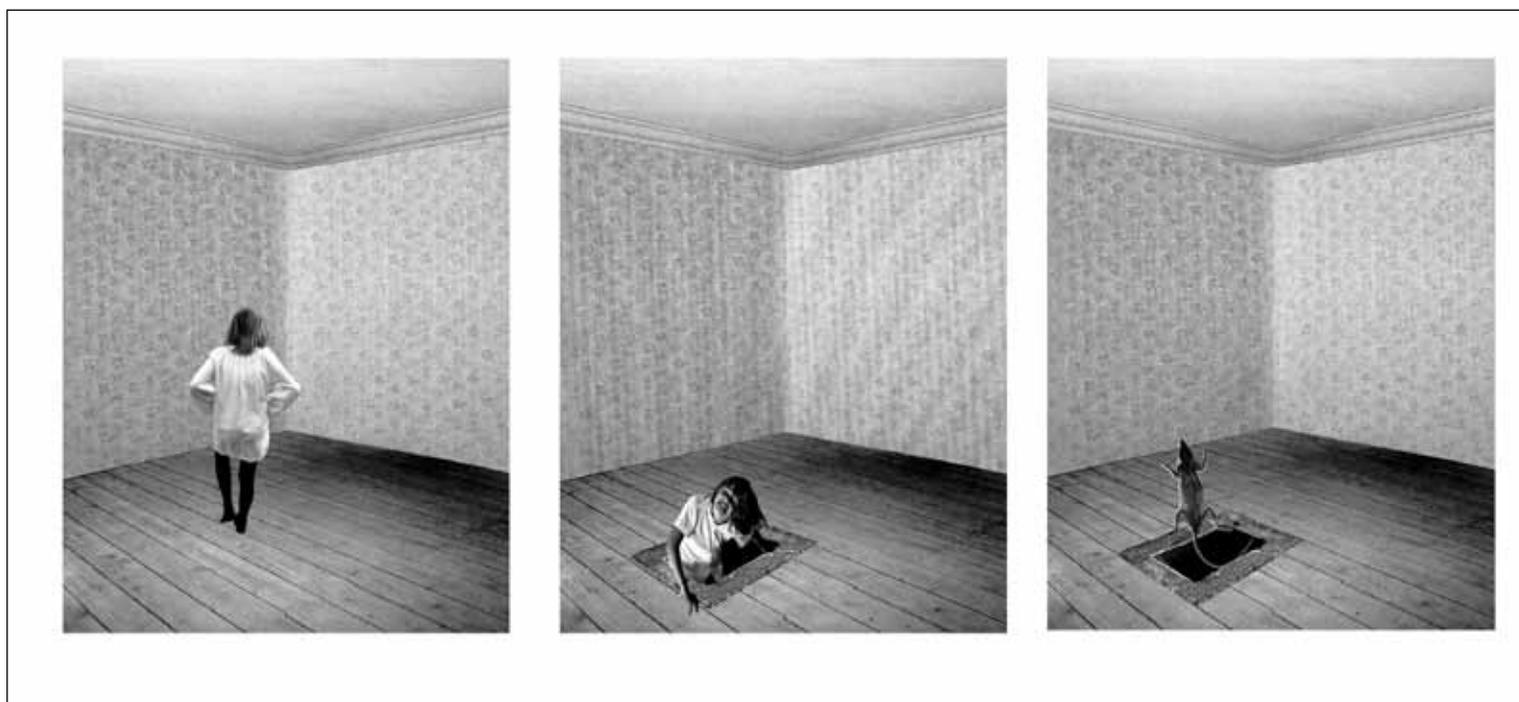
the location and people are being destabilised.

Faced with the sophistication and range of possibilities that digital imaging allows, she uses her tools sparingly and skillfully.

"My work could be described as organic....I will have an agenda or thoughts in mind to begin with, of course, and proceed to make what I would call preliminary sketches or triggers. A finished work may evolve quite quickly but more often than not it's a slow process with a lot of trial and error involved."



Max Ernst, *Dreaming with Open Eyes*, 1933



Pat Brassington, *Below Stairs*, 2006

Her 2007 series Cambridge Road, illustrates her pared back approach to computer-assisted manipulation. At first glance its works seem straightforward, almost forensic. On closer look, however, nothing is certain: a flare of light or shadow suggests something else in the space. A stain on a wall becomes an emission reminding us of haunted early spirit photography and of how surrealists used marks as starting points to make works. A normal dog seems like it's electrified with some kind of terror outside the frame. We see the muted pinks and greens of old interiors. Brassington restricts her colour palette for desired emotional resonances. We are led to ask questions. Are these crime photos?



Pat Brassington, Cambridge Road 2007

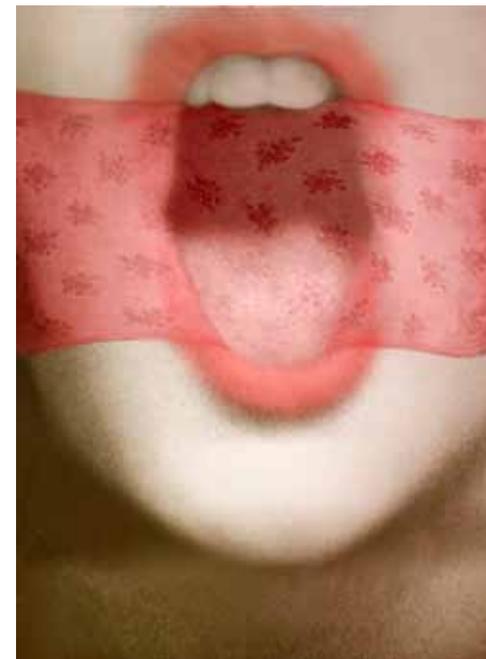
For some time now, Brassington has been exploring the possibilities of pink, the tinted colours and tones of flesh. "It's not my intention to feminise the image by using pink," she said. "It's nastier than that. Pink smothers." With digital technology she has been able to intensify and mute colour to create erotic suggestions that confuse us in their non-erotic qualities. Psychological nuances have deathly implications.

So many of our anxious dreams concern our mouths. Mouths for Brassington are sometimes closed over, gagged and they expel. Children are silenced often by a feminine kind of material. There is a monstrous kind of beauty to many of her images.

Her enigmatic titles come last and are great examples of her pleasure at play and wit. eg "Cambridge Road" tantalises us with a place name, "Bloom" with botanical associations.



Pat Brassington, Font, 2007



Forget Your Perfect, 2008



Bloom, 2003

Further reading

Catalogue- A Rebours 2012 ACCA

<http://artreview.com.au/contents/79078395-pat-brassington>

<http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/brassington/>

http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/search/?artist_id=brassington-pat

Anne Marsh Light -Writing desire and other fantasies. Telling tales: the child in photography. Monash University Gallery 2000

Anne Marsh and Pat Brassington- Pat Brassington: This Is Not Photograph 2006 Quintus Publishing

Edward Colless - This is not a love song: Monash University Gallery 2000

Edward Colless A Rebus 2012

Catrina Moore- Indecent Exposures: 20 years of Australian Feminist Photography; Allen and Unwin, 1994

ART INDUSTRY CONTEXTS

Curriculum Links

Curatorial Rationale/Approaches

Pat Brassington has been chosen for the The Influential Australian Artist series that is run each year by the gallery. It aims to expose new audiences, students, young artists and mainstream media to the history of significant Australian practice in an effort to build legacies of practice and consolidate the national significance of selected artists. ACCA also provides the opportunity for the artist to gain an overview of his or her own work at a critical stage in an extended career.

Artistic director/Curator Juliana Engberg has designed a set of salon rooms. She worked alongside an Exhibitions Manager who organized spaces and the team who worked as installers. Juliana has chosen a particular blue to the internal walls to give emphasis to the unsettling domesticity and claustrophobic atmosphere lodged in Brassington's images.

It is not a traditional hanging in chronological manner. Older works intersperse with newer works to create a set of visual itineraries. The viewer can move back and across for connections. The show winds in a way that you can go forward and come back through different works. Labels are not next to particular works so that the work

is read without a title. All works are listed at doorways. It is believed that too much information near the works can distract from a personal interpretation.

ACCA brings a high level of craftsmanship and detail to its installations which are purpose designed and specially built for each exhibition. Walls are changed regularly to create spaces that suit specific artist's work. This is a major part of the presentation and specific to the content and understanding of an artists' work.



ACCA publishes a very substantial catalogue to accompany this part of the program. The catalogue is illustrated with essays by invited contributors, previously published articles, context essays and an interview with the artist. If appropriate, source and archival materials will also be reproduced. ACCA will create other interpretations platforms including VodCAST, PODcast and Education literature.

The gallery is funded by the Australian Government as well as corporations listed by logos at the bottom of this document.

Exhibitions are listed in Art Almanac, the Age, and The Monthly.

A company named JC Decaux do posters at train stations for ACCA.

Chanel 31" Inside Art" do regular interviews about shows at ACCA.

Conservation

The recommended lighting levels for exhibitions adhered to in Australian Public Galleries are:

- Up to 50 lux for original photographs, printed paper, watercolours and with UV levels of up to 30 microwatts per lumen.

Consistency of temperature and humidity is crucial during an exhibition. The recommended temperature level for galleries is 20°C (+/- 2°C)

Some early works have been pinned to the wall. Others are in frames with acid free mounts.

- the recommended relative humidity range for photographs is 30–50%RH (galleries must select a level within this range. High relative humidity would cause mould and fading. Too low a level would dry out artworks. All framed photographs are surrounded with acid-free mounts so that acidity doesn't eat into the artwork. Invigilators are employed to keep an eye out so that no one visiting the

gallery touches the work. They keep a particular eye on the pinned works that are more vulnerable. Cotton gloves are worn when handling any artworks.

ACCA is unusual as a public gallery as it does not keep a collection. Artworks are returned to the artists and collectors at completion of exhibitions.

A condition report is completed when work arrives at the gallery and another one is completed when work is shipped back to owners to ensure that no damage has happened in the gallery.

Professional Roles at ACCA

Executive Director- deals with funding, sponsorship- the business end of ACCA

Artistic Director also works as a Curator- She travels inter-state and internationally to set up relationships with artists and dealers in order to plan particular shows at ACCA with them. She writes catalogues, gives lectures and plans how shows will be hung in planned spaces.

2X **Associate curators**- similar roles as Artistic director

On-line Communications co-ordinator

Public and education Programs manager- provides opportunities for the public to learn more about artists and their work

Assistant Exhibition Co-ordinator

Designer- catalogues, invitations, advertisements

Publicity Manager

Front of House Co-ordinators- notify staff of arrival of education groups, phones, mail etc.

Invigilators- keep an eye on the safety of work and answer questions from the public

Studio Arts Unit 4- Area of Study 3

Comparing the roles of public galleries, commercial galleries and other art spaces- see on-line notes

Analyse considerations in preparing and presenting an exhibition and/or displaying artworks. Walls are moved as ACCA is a very flexible space.

Analyse methods and considerations involved in the conservation of artwork.

Examine curatorial, exhibition design and promotional methods.

Activity

Reflect on the following questions when investigating characteristics of different art spaces

What is the purpose of the gallery?

What is the purpose of the exhibition?

Who determines what and when artworks are presented?

How many exhibitions are held a year?

Why do artists need to exhibit?

Who hangs the artwork?

Who owns the artwork?

Who designs the exhibition space?

Who determines the layout of the exhibition?

Who determines the colour of the

walls? Other decorative elements?

Who decides where the work is placed?

Who is allowed to handle the work?

How are the artworks moved?

How are the artworks looked after?

Who determines ways of marketing?

What ways of marketing are there? Who designs brochures, posters and advertisements?

Who designs the website?

Who writes didactic information and where is it positioned? E.g. labels and catalogues. Are labels used in all galleries? Where are they positioned?

Need more Information?

Additional kits available for school groups

VCE ART

Analyse, interpret, compare and contrast artworks of Pat Brassington with those of Hans Bellmer using the Formal Framework and the Cultural Framework. Max Ernst would be another recommended artist to compare.

Formal Framework

What materials and techniques have Pat Brassington and Hans Bellmer used? How do the materials used or the technical skills shape or affect interpretation? Is this due to inherent qualities of the materials or to their application by the artist?

Personal Framework

What relationship does the artwork have to the artists' lives and experiences? What visual evidence supports this reading? Have the artists used specific processes or practices in creating the artworks that may reflect their personal philosophies and ideas?

Cultural Framework

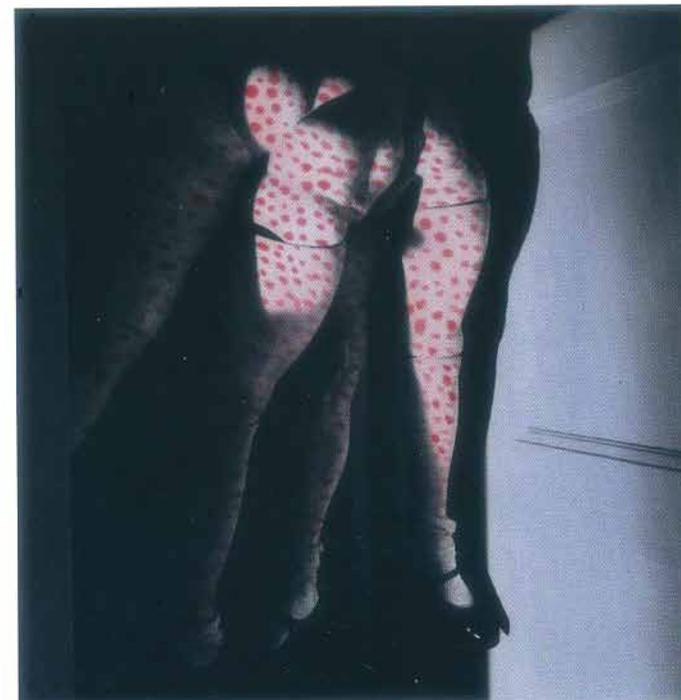
How do the social, political, cultural or religious contexts of the artworks contribute to meaning? How have historical or contemporary events shaped the intention of the artists or our understanding of the artworks meanings?

Contemporary Framework

How does the choice or presentation of subject matter or medium, materials and techniques reflect or challenge artistic or social traditions?



Hans Bellmer- La Poupée, 1936



Seconde Partie, 1936



Pat Brassington Radar 2010



Starlight 2001

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