

Consumed: Stilled Lives Exhibition

My research examines the relation between people and objects, and the impact that adverts have as producers and disseminators of social values. My central argument is that commodity culture turns everything into adverts, from seventeenth century still-life paintings to selfies and thinspiration photographs. Commercial advertising and social media networks are examined as methods of circulating and embedding the social value of products but also a site for potential disruption.

The still life table expresses the dual meaning of the term 'consume' because the objects on display are edible and connote an individual's social position through the ability to buy prestigious objects. I therefore approach the still life table as a portrait of a particular type of consumer. This allows me to consider the food in a still life as an expression of a relation between an individual and consumer society, as well as a figuration of the effect of commodity consumption on the consumer's body. The exhibition encompasses a variety of Still Life's suggestive of different consumers and the contradictory relationships to consumerism.

Artworks

Celebrate 2012-15

Consume Book 2013-16

Estrange Restrain Book 2013-16

Lure 2014

Pacifier 2014

Hysterical Selfies 2015

Wish Book 2015 www.instagram.com/dawncwoolley/

Sirens 2015-16 <https://soundcloud.com/dawn-woolley-665900606>

Nature Morte 2016

Exhibitions

Consumed: Stilled Lives (solo exhibition) Dyson Gallery, Royal College of Art, London, 14th – 18th December 2016

Hysterical Selfies and Docile Bodies Experimentica International Performance Art Festival, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, 7th November 2015

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uv7mA66256E>

Short Lived Pleasure (solo exhibition and performance) Bloc Projects, Sheffield 9th June – 23rd July 2012

<https://vimeo.com/77896897>

Publications

Lure Photographs, *3am Magazine*, online literature and philosophy journal. Accompanying Sound Piece and Text by Dr Sharon Kivland 19th June 2015

<https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/are-you-a-doctor-sir/>

Pacifier Photograph, *3am Magazine*, online literature and philosophy journal. Accompanying Poem by Steven J Fowler 8th May 2015

<https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/seahorse/>

Celebrate (Nightfeeder) Photographs, *3am Magazine*, online literature and philosophy journal. Accompanying Fiction by Candy Sue Ellison 5th May 2015
<https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/odds-evens/>

Celebrate (blancmange dentate) photograph, in educational pack for Diffusion, International Photography Festival, 2013

Artist Talks and In-Conversations

Hysterical Selfies and the Commercial Construction of Identity on Social Networking Sites paper, Visualizing Consumer Culture, Commodifying Visual Culture in the English-speaking World conference. Sorbonne University, Paris. 21st – 22nd 2016

Selfies: Still Life or Nature Morte keynote paper, (Dis)Connected Forms: Narratives on the Fractured Self conference. Wilberforce Institute for the study of Slavery and Emancipation, University of Hull. 8th – 9th September 2016

Food, Photography and the Eating Disordered Body talk. Research Department, Kings College London. 27th Oct 2014

Curb Your Enthusiasm: Art, Philosophy and Censorship. In Conversation: with Professor Stephen Mumford, Philosopher and Dean of the School of Art, University of Nottingham. Nottingham Contemporary.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDV4I28Cenk> 18th Nov 2014

Pathological Consumers: Spectacular Bodies in the Nineteenth Century paper and exhibition of photographs and objects, Gender, Generation and the Body. West of England and South Wales Women's History Network, Cardiff University. 21st June 2014

Grants and Awards

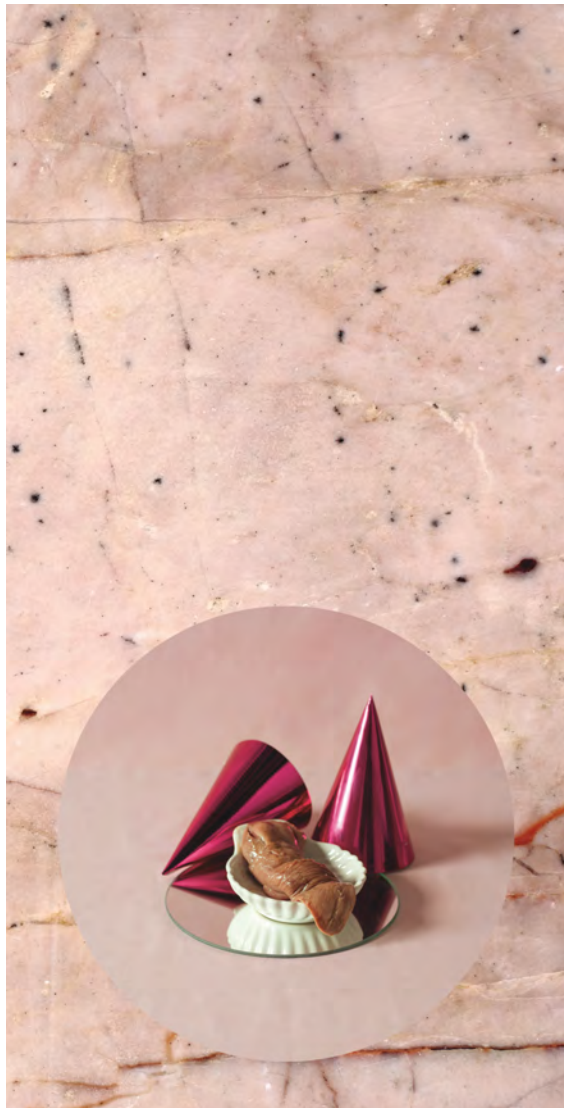
Celebrate (Nightfeeder) Final Selection – Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts Young Portfolio Acquisitions, 2015

Shortlisted – Red Mansion Art Prize, Royal College of Art, May 2015

Celebrate (Heart and Tea Party), Awarded - Arts Council of Wales Training Grant Dec 2012 – May 2013

Shortlisted – Constance Fairness Foundation Award, Royal College of Art Dec 2011

Exhibition Invitation



Consumed: Stilled Lives and the Pathologies of Capitalism

Dawn Woolley

Private view: 6-9pm, Thursday 15th December

Exhibition opening times:

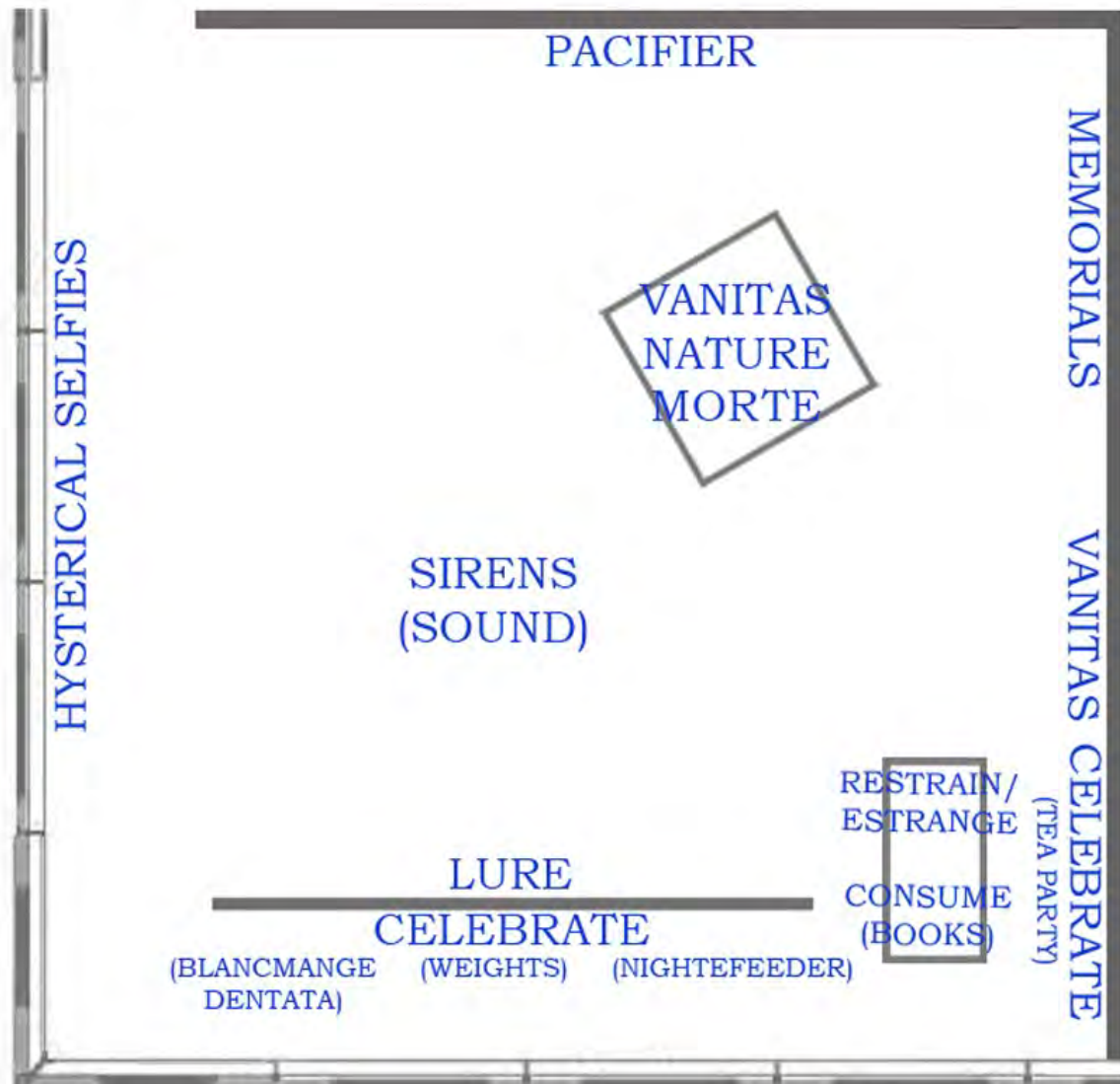
Wed 14th - Fri 16th December 10am - 5.30pm

Sat 17th - Sun 18th December by appointment

Dyson Gallery, Royal College of Art,
Dyson Building, 1 Hester Road, London SW11 4AN

Between 2nd & 15th December work will also be displayed in
advertising spaces in the surrounding area (see enclosed map).
I am grateful to City Centre Posters for providing these spaces.

Exhibition Floorplan

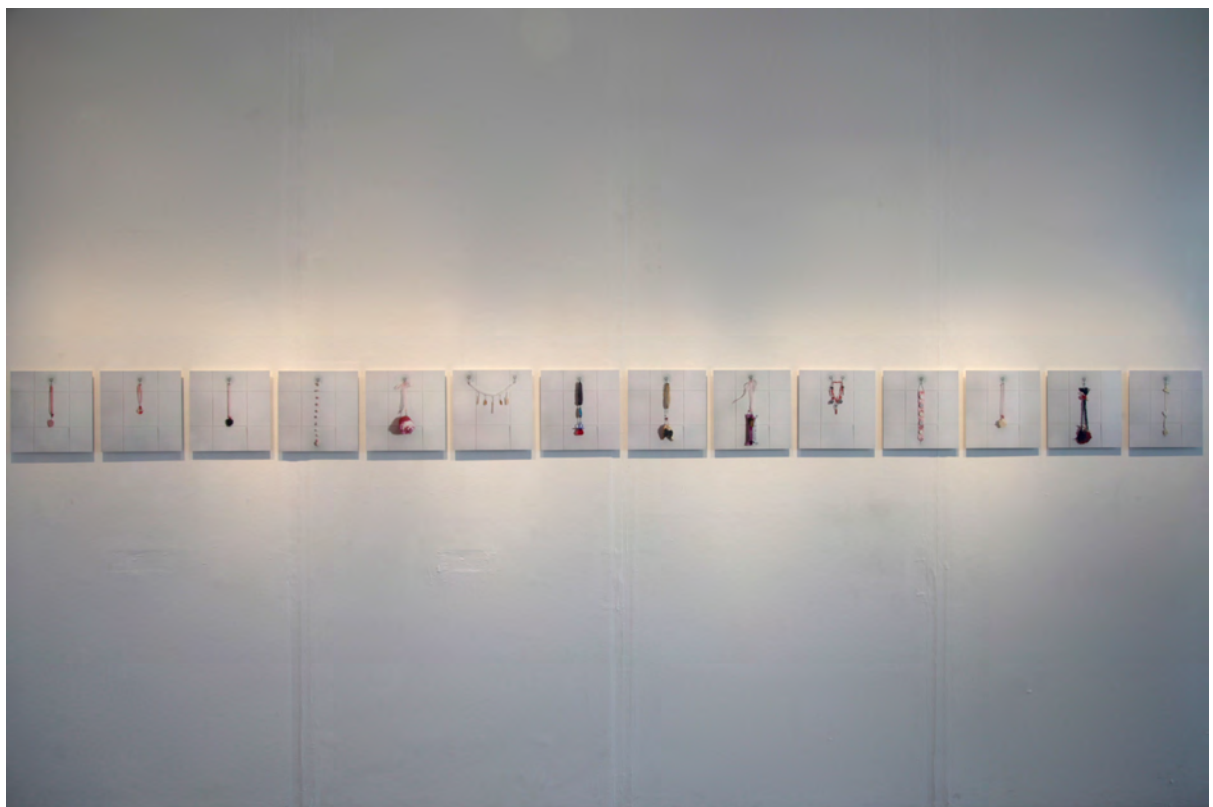


Installation Photographs









Dawn Woolley

Consumed: Stilled Lives and the Pathologies of Capitalism



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In my art work photography is both subject and medium: I produce photographs in response to photographs in popular visual culture, particularly advertising. I examine the use of social networking sites as a commercial site in which body ideals are disseminated. I argue that if the body is a commodity and also a display of commodities, photographs of the body can be seen as still life compositions. The distinction between still life and portrait is blurred.

The exhibition encompasses a variety of Still Life's suggestive of different consumers. Photographs and photographic interventions are brought together to reflect contradictory relationships to consumerism. Commercial advertising and social media networks are examined as methods of circulating and embedding the social value of products but also a site for potential disruption.

Interventions into the commercial visual landscape include work on posters and billboards shown in Cardiff in 2014/5, and currently on display in London. To intervene in a commercial space in which advertising tactics are far more insidious than in traditional advertising media, I disseminated this work on social networking sites using hashtags that reveal the commodities signifying message. *Wishbook* is an on-going digital project produced for instagram. The title *Wishbook* derives from nineteenth century commodity catalogues such as *The Great Wish Book* and *American Dream Book*, selling the American way of life. The title also alludes to Benjamin's idea that consumers can appropriate commodities as emancipatory wish images. The wish images look like poor quality adverts or the content of a bin and the hashtags read like bad poetry. They appear among advertisements on social networking sites and behave abnormally. *Wishbook* can be viewed here; <https://www.instagram.com/dawncwoolley/>

Exhibition opening times: Wed 14th – Fri 16th 10am-5.30pm
Sat 17th – Sun 18th December by appointment
(please contact dawn.woolley@network.rca.ac.uk)

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VANITAS

Still life images are portraits of a type, evoking unseen subjects who possess and consume the objects on display. Drawing on both definitions of the term 'consume' I use food still life photography to represent different characters and positions in relation to advanced capitalist society. What I eat and how I eat is a metonym of my wider consumer habits. Food is also employed as a metaphor for the subjection of my body under capitalist systems. The commodities I consume are integrated in my identity and my identity is shaped to a marketing demographic. I am what I consume. I am an advertisement for the commodities I consume.



Vanitas Still Life, 2012, 50cm x 50cm [c-type photograph]

LURE

Consumers living in the proto-capitalist society of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century had to conciliate the incompatible demands of surplus society and Calvinism. An allegorical interpretation of still life paintings produced during this time suggests a conflict between pleasure and piousness.

In contemporary consumer culture I am required to delay gratification and demonstrate a strong work ethic in order to fulfill the need for production. I am also simultaneously impelled to consume to excess under the hedonist incitement to 'treat myself' in order to fulfill the need for consumption and capitalist growth. *Lure* focuses on this contradiction in advanced capitalist society. Diet foods are commodities *par excellence*; they conform to the dictum of self-denial without contradicting the imperative to consume. They enable me to appear restrained and indulge myself in the same instance.

The objects in *Lure* suggest equivalence between duped prey, a consumer dazzled by an advertising image, and the 'absorbed credulity' of a fetish worshiper. The series contains thirty photographs (sixteen shown here). Each image is composed and lit in the same way but shows a unique object. Each image and object take its signifying value from its relation to the other images and objects in the series. The series is designed to impel the consumer to collect the complete series.



Lure (06), 2014, 30cm x 30cm [digital photograph]



Lure (17), 2014, 30cm x 30cm [digital photograph]

CELEBRATE (NIGHT FEEDER)

Night Feeder refers to the case of Sarah Jacob, the nineteenth century 'Welsh Fasting Girl'. Sarah was heralded as a miraculous saint. She lived at the advent of medical empiricism. Doctors decided to test her miraculous devotion by observing her closely over the course of eight days during which she starved to death. She was later labelled a hysterical night feeder.



Night Feeder (A), 2013, 50cm x 62cm [c-type photograph]

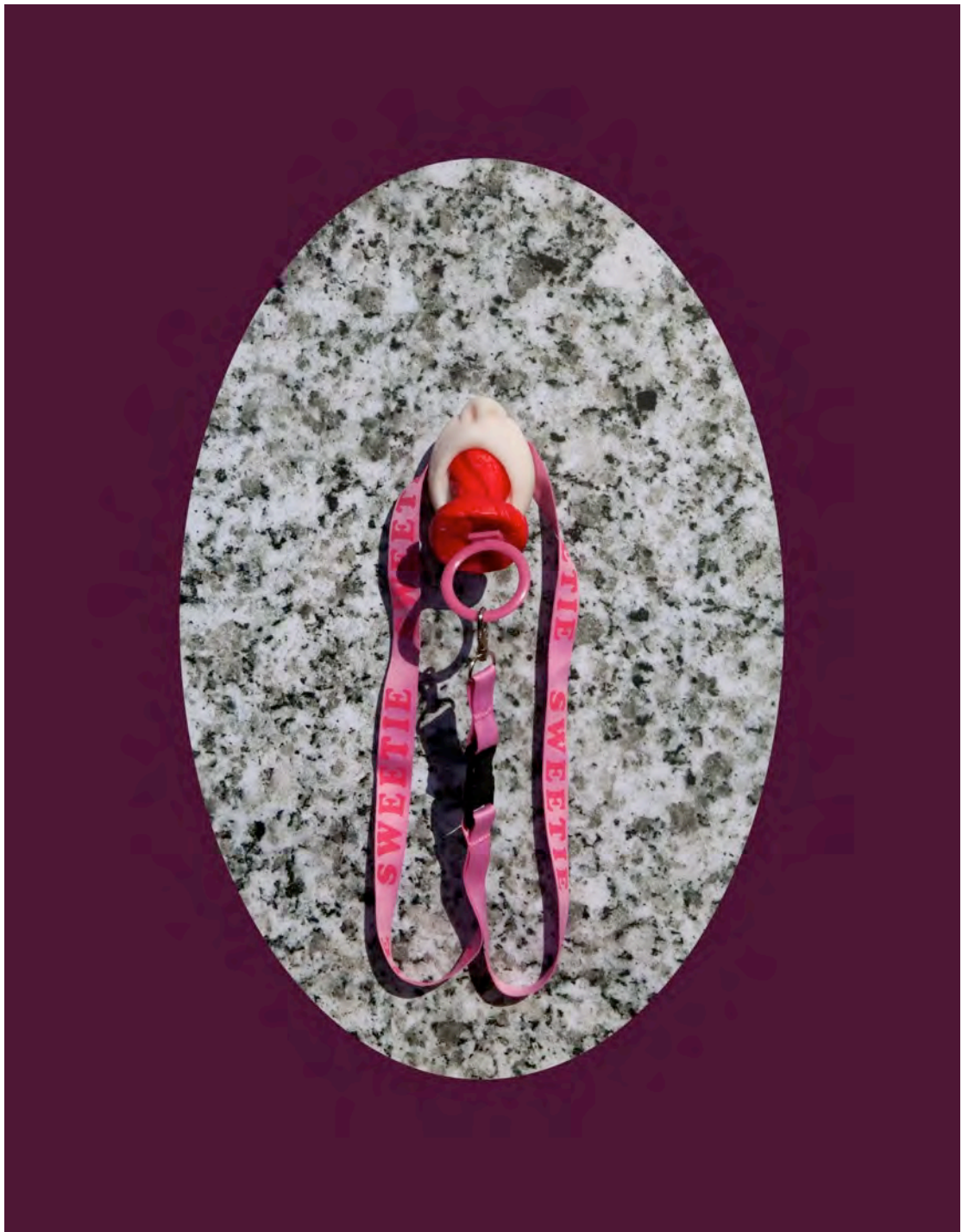
PACIFIER

pacify (v.)

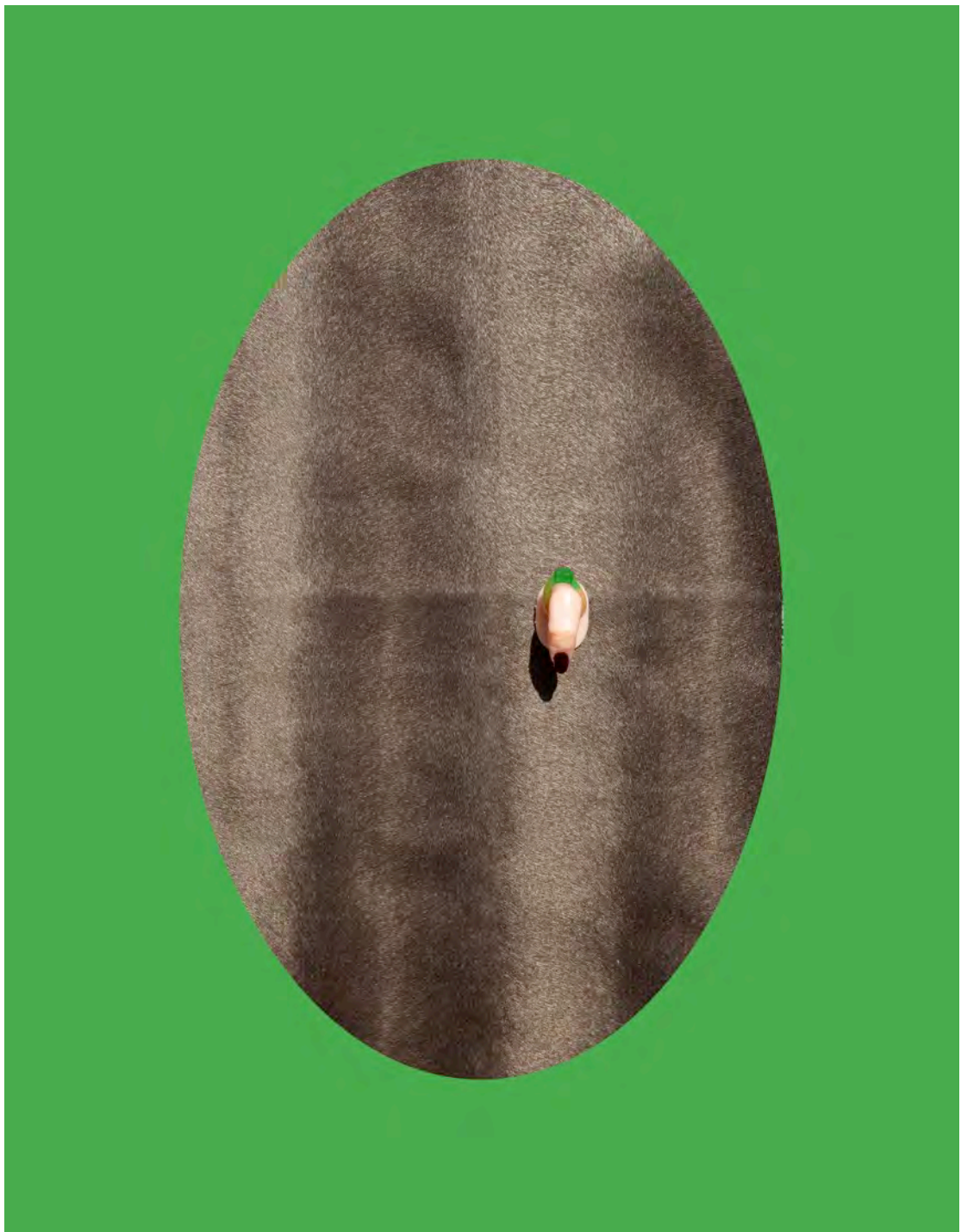
late 15c., "appease, allay the anger of (someone)," from Latin *pacificare* "to make peace; pacify,". Of countries or regions, "to bring to a condition of calm," c.1500, from the start with suggestions of submission and terrorization.

Pacifier considers consumption – particularly the body-labour required to achieve an ideal body – as a form of distraction from social inequality. Overt sexualisation and infantilisation is implied by the sweets, sex toys and nail art practice dummies representing pacified consumers.

Each work contains multiple surfaces vying for attention, the textures of the faux surfaces in the ellipse directly compete with the objects they support and the coloured expanses surrounding them. The vignettes may be viewed as portraits or the beheaded trophies of a hunter.



Pacifier (01), 2014, 65cm x 50cm [digital photograph]



Pacifier (10), 2014, 65cm x 50cm [digital photograph]

CELEBRATE (BLANCMANGE DENTATA)

The *Blancmange Dentata* photographs were made in response to written entries on 'thinspiration' and 'pro-anorexia' websites, in which anorexics describe the temptation of food and attempts to suppress the desire to eat. The photographs suggest consumption is both threatening and appealing – although the food is a biting mouth, it is also soft and unable to cause injury.



Blancmange Dentata (B), 2012, 50cm x 62cm [c-type photograph]

CONSUME

Consume references the etymology of the term bulimia which involves a process of purging food from the body. Photographs of real food become photographs of photographs of real food establishing a connection between consumption practices and advertisements, surface appeal, pretense, and lack of substance. Like the bulimic binge, consumption does not provide pleasure.



Consume, 2014-16, 20cm x 25cm [photography book]

WISHBOOKS, SIRENS, AND HYSTERICAL SELFIES

Each *Hysterical Selfie* photograph represents a consumer demographic based on the ideological messages of commodities. In advertisements marketing demographics appear specific and yet appeal to a large audience. This is achieved by shaping consumers to the demographic. The discourse of immaterial labour recuperates differences and homogenises identities. To emphasise the ideological messages of the commodities in the photographs each product appears in *Wishbook* as a wish image. The title *Wishbook* derives from nineteenth century commodity catalogues such as *The Great Wish Book* and *American Dream Book*, selling the American way of life. The title also alludes to Benjamin's idea that consumers can appropriate commodities as emancipatory wish images.

To intervene in a commercial space in which advertising tactics are far more insidious than in traditional advertising media, I disseminated this work on social networking sites using hashtags that reveal the commodities signifying message. The wish images look like poor quality adverts or the content of a bin and the hashtags read like bad poetry. They appear among advertisements on social networking sites and behave abnormally.

One of the most invasive developments of online advertising is autoplay videos. As I browse a page the soundtrack of an advertisement plays in the background and I am forced to look for the ad in order to stop it. I can choose not to look but it is difficult not to hear. I wanted my wish images to share this aggressive insistence, so I created *Sirens*. Like the social interactions of the microcelebrity masking commercial exchange, in *Sirens* the commodity speaks with an almost human voice, softly whispering its ideological messages.



Hysterical Selfie (Super Grip), 2015, 94cm x 70cm [digital photograph]



Hysterical Selfie (Liberté), 2015, 94cm x 70cm [digital photograph]



Hysterical Selfie (Puritee), 2015, 94cm x 70cm [digital photograph]

CELEBRATE (TEA PARTY)

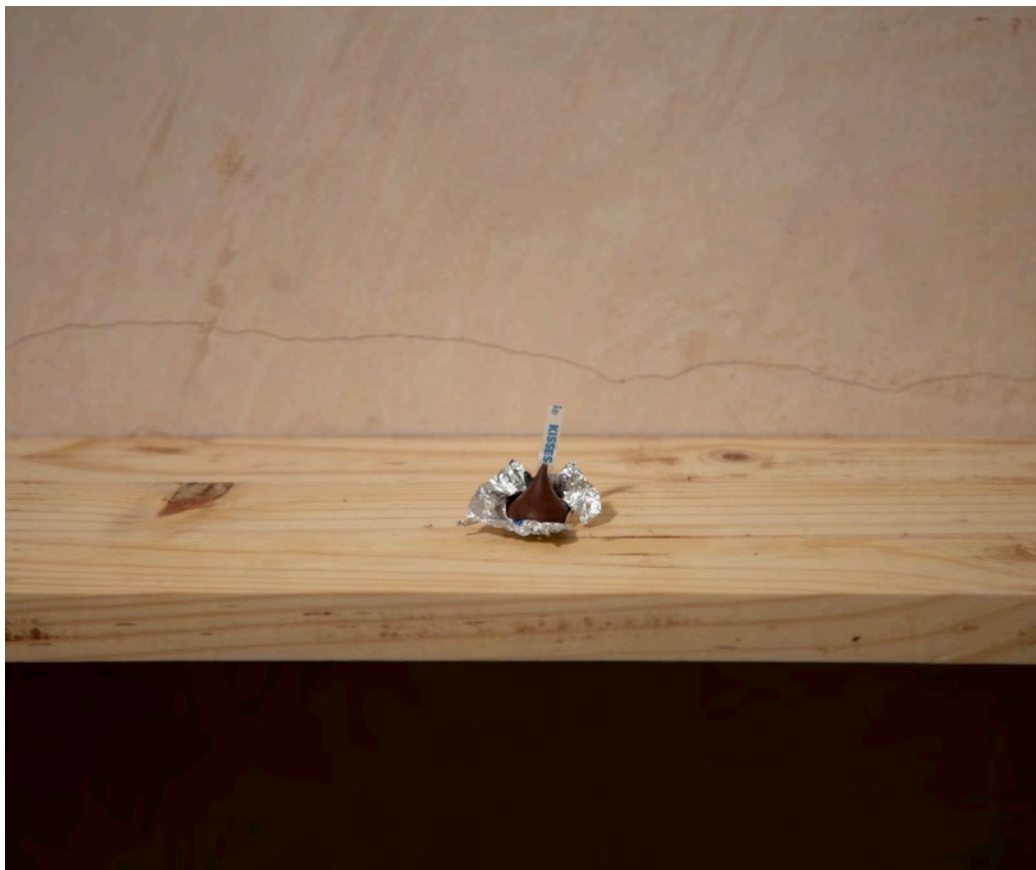
The *Tea Party* photographs are my response to research into the visualisation of food in eating disorders. Commonly anorexics imagine food drained of colour and aroma to help suppress desire. In both photographs the food is inedible, eradicating its value as food. In the white photograph the food is made of the same porcelain as the containers, raising the food to the status of a crafted and delicate object. In the grey photograph the object is made of concrete, a common, inexpensive material. The different materials evoke the shifting status of food in the lives of eating disorder sufferers, in turn object of disgust and obsession. Food to be consumed is turned into petrified matter.



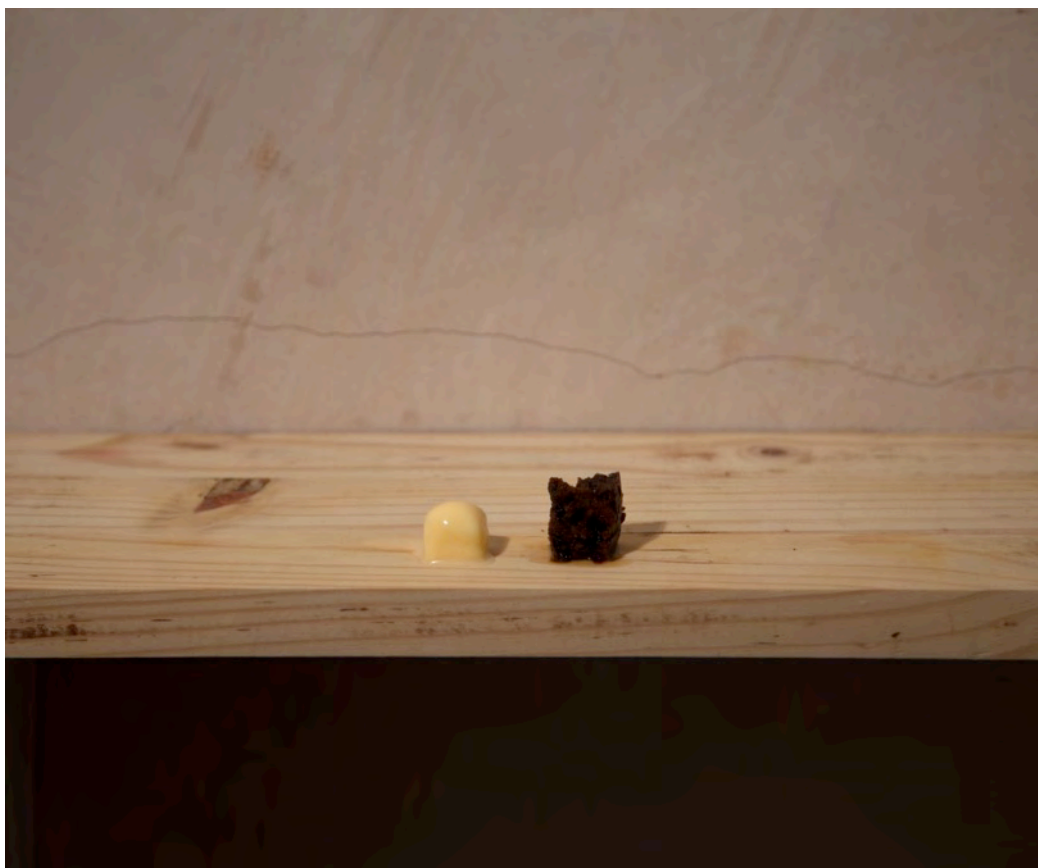
Tea Party (White), 2013, 50cm x 62cm [c-type photograph]

ESTRANGE RESTRAIN

Estranged Meals explores fragmentation and compartmentalisation typical of an anorexic view of food. To waste time and conceal how little food is consumed anorexics frequently cut the food into very small pieces. To make it appear unappetising it is cut into angular, geometric shapes. Some of the tactics of anorexic eating habits can be found in consumer culture. Feminised treats such as Hershey Kisses are sold as individually wrapped chocolates, indicating permissible portion size to the consumer: Indulgence must be restrained.



Estrange Restrained, 2014, 20cm x 25cm [photography book]



MEMORIALS

Memorials are neither still life nor portrait but represent the subject becoming *nature morte*. Rotting flesh is arranged among the paraphernalia of celebration, signalling the end of the consumer party. Regardless of body-labour or workout ethic the body sags into amorphous organic forms. To evoke the idea of a memorial to a lost object the photographs are installed leaning against the gallery wall propped up by two deflated balloons.



Memorials (Tongue and Heart), 2016, Research Work in Progress Exhibition, Royal College of Art [digital installation photograph]

CELEBRATE (WEIGHT)

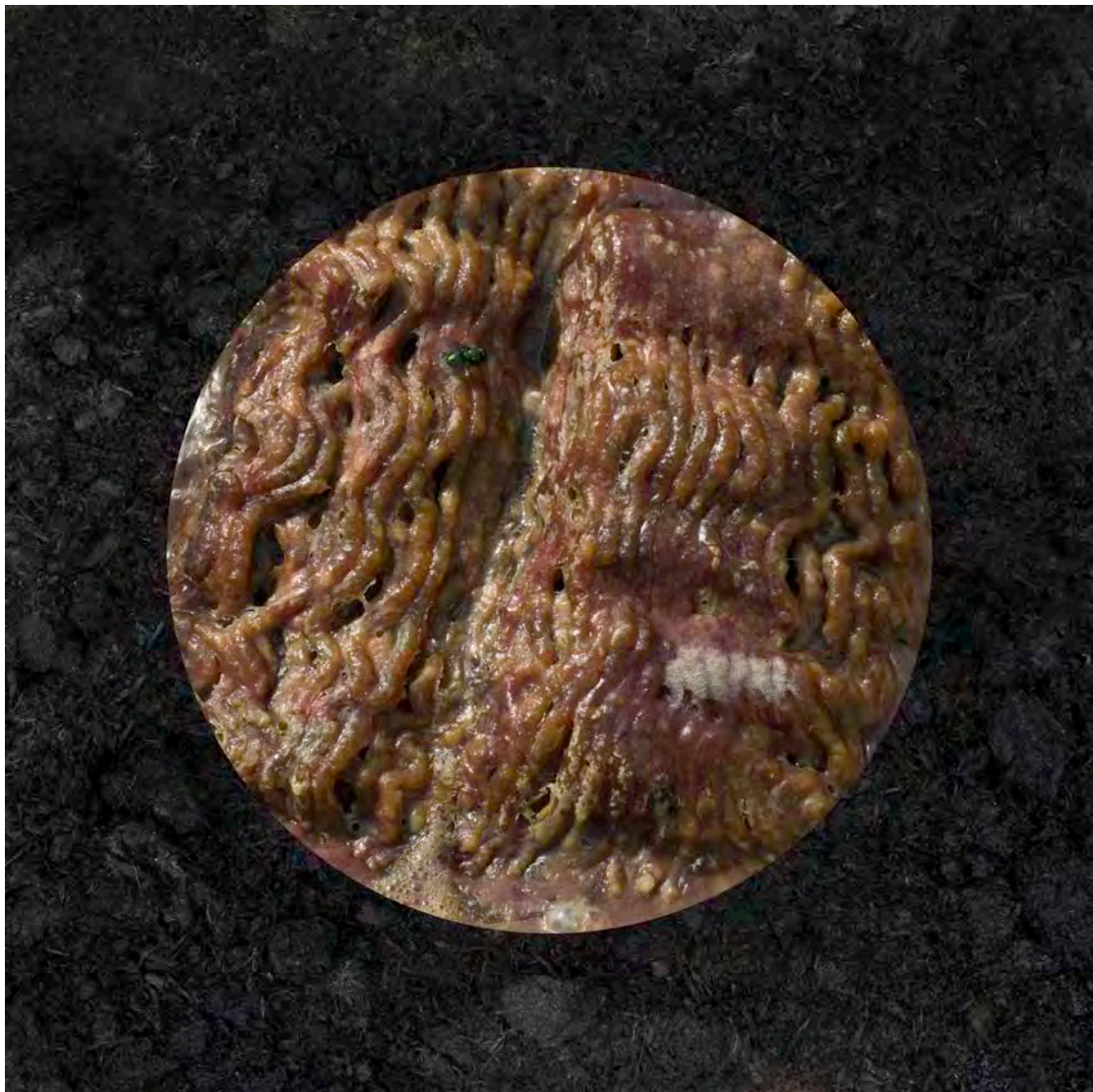
Weight considers the social stigma attached to being fat and the medicalisation of the overweight body. The photographs were produced for a series of advertising posters displayed in Cardiff City center in January 2015. I wanted to draw attention to the abrupt shift in advertising rhetoric once the Christmas and New Year period is over. The images in the posters allude to the excesses of the holiday period that are often followed by self-recriminations and sometimes lead to diets and even surgery.



Weight (6), 2014-5, 60cm x 40cm [digital photograph]

VANITAS NATURE MORTE

The positive, highly sexualized, dazzling commodity-body is viewed from a distance as a complete object and represented in photographs as a 'stilled life'. An abject body would not reproduce the sign-values of the Spectacle. The boundaries of this body are open as it eats, shits, dies and decays. The distinction between subject / object, food / feeder, and self / other is lost. It would be photographed at close proximity so the viewer cannot see it in its entirety.



Vanitas Nature Morte, 2016, 70cm x 70cm [digital photograph mounted on MDF, four plastic fruits]



Vanitas Nature Morte, 2016, PhD viva Exhibition, Royal College of Art [digital installation photograph]

