

Still.

Stray.

Paula
Chambers
Stowaway.



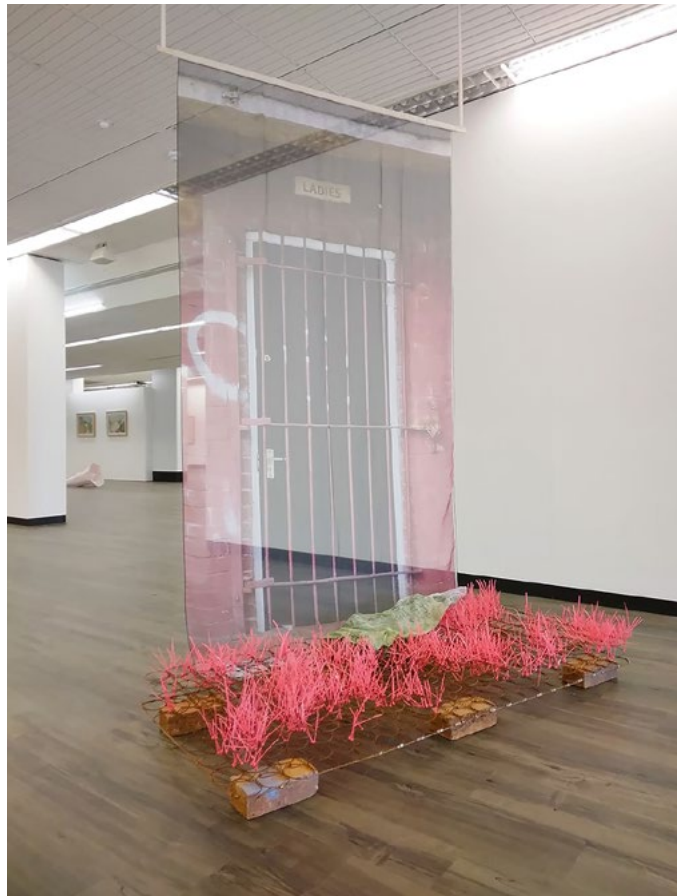
Feminist Escape Route Attempt No. 7, 2021



Bulge, 2023 (left) and **Heart and Soul**, 2024 (right)

Paula Chambers
Still. Stray. Stowaway.
23 May–27 September 2025

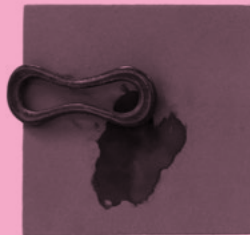
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Woman Trouble, 2024

Curatorial Introduction

MARIANNA TSIONKI
2025



Mimicking Menstruation
(detail), 2024

Paula Chambers' sculptural practice interrogates the domestic sphere as a contested site of feminist resistance, material transformation, and personal negotiation. Her work disrupts conventional narratives of femininity and domesticity, questioning how objects, spaces, and bodies are encoded with gendered expectations and constraints. In her latest solo exhibition at the Blenheim Walk Gallery, *Still. Stray. Stowaway.*, Chambers presents a constellation of sculptural assemblages, interventions, and installations that evoke the instability of domestic life, the porous boundaries between public and private spaces, and the material traces of everyday experience.

This exhibition continues Chambers' practiced research, giving form to her inquiries into feminist and domestic materialities. Some of the works included have been exhibited in previous iterations across Europe, where her nomadic strategy of transporting artworks in a suitcase has allowed for site-responsive interventions outside traditional gallery settings. By bringing these works together alongside other series and new sculptures at the Blenheim Walk Gallery, Chambers tests methods of presentation and the relationality between different series, creating zones that encourage shifting encounters between objects and their viewers.

The title *Still. Stray. Stowaway.* encapsulates the exhibition's core concerns. To stay still is to remain motionless, to resist erasure, to occupy space with quiet defiance. To stray is to drift beyond imposed boundaries, to reject containment. To stow away is to navigate invisibility, to move illicitly, to claim space through subversive means. These three states reflect the material and conceptual conditions of Chambers' sculptural practice, which embraces disruption, mobility, and feminist storytelling. Through this exhibition, Chambers deepens her investigation into gendered labour, material displacement, and domestic rebellion, testing new configurations and creating a space where feminist resistance takes physical form.

Chambers’ practice engages these feminist art strategies to disrupt traditional structures of artistic labour, its material and spatial conventions. This becomes particularly evident in her *Feral Interventions* series, which navigates between transient, peripheral spaces and formal exhibition settings, questioning the rigidity of institutional frameworks, and the notion that art must exist within prescribed, stable environments to be recognised or valued. By positioning her work between institutional engagement and autonomy, Chambers highlights the tensions surrounding visibility, labour, and access within the art world. Staying true to the restless spirit of *Feral Interventions*, both *Bad Faith* (2024) and *Little Losses* (2024) were conceived to evade institutional containment. Now, entering the gallery, they shift from being fugitive gestures to exhibited objects, raising critical questions: *What happens when artworks that once occupied makeshift or fleeting spaces are placed within a gallery environment? Does their ferality persist, or is it tamed?*

Bad Faith (2024) consists of two freestanding sculptural assemblages—delicate, table-like structures supporting beauty products encased in intricately crocheted coverings. Perched on spindly tripod legs, these objects exude both balance and precarity, as if poised for movement or withdrawal. Crafted in the intimacy of the artist’s home, the work carries a sense of domestic familiarity, yet when placed in a new setting, it shifts in scale and significance. Objects once functional and recognisably domestic become fragile artifacts of transformation, their vulnerability heightened by displacement.

Little Losses (2024) similarly evokes transience, engaging more explicitly with material traces of absence and transformation. A wig of artificial pink hair entwined with copper twigs, a knotted string bag holding a glass paperweight, and a small, oxidised copper dish containing rose quartz eggs—these elements appear both decorative and displaced. The material fragility of glass and oxidised copper reinforces themes of impermanence and quiet resilience, prompting contemplation of what is preserved, altered, or lost over time.

Within the gallery, these works maintain a sense of unease, their history of movement lingering through material contrasts, spatial positioning, and conceptual disruption. Their nomadic past survives, raising questions about whether their ferality endures or is subdued by institutional framing. No longer at risk of being overlooked or displaced, they are now fixed in place, granted the stability they once resisted. Yet their unsettling presence remains—objects that carry the imprint of past itinerancies, bearing the residue of impermanence even as they momentarily settle. *Bad Faith* and *Little Losses* blur the boundary between inside and outside the institution, resisting the conventions of institutional programming while still engaging their physical and conceptual framework. Chambers’ practice hovers in this liminal space, neither wholly within nor entirely outside the structures of curatorial validation. In bringing these feral works into the gallery, the exhibition itself becomes a site of negotiation, testing the limits of containment and the possibility of resistance within institutional walls.



Bad Faith, 2024



Little Losses, 2024

The sculptural objects that comprise *Still. Stray. Stowaway.* occupy space with an air of transience. They appear as though they might wander off, dissipate, or return to their previous states as abandoned domestic objects. Their presence is non-imposing yet insistently there, reflecting Chambers’ own experience of navigating space. These works are made to be disassembled, packed up, and reconstructed, following an ethos of adaptability and minimal use of materials. Their scale and adaptability reinforce a model of making that is ecological, economical, and mobile, allowing for ease of transport and reconfiguration across different contexts.



**The Surrogate
(Ceremonial Object), 2024**



Last Bus Home, 2024



To Serve and Protect, 2023



The Trappings of Power, 2022

Some of Chambers' sculptures have an affective, quasi-human presence, suggesting psychological states or social roles rather than literal figures. These include *The Surrogate (Ceremonial Object)* (2024), *To Serve and Protect* (2023), *The Trappings of Power* (2022), *Last Bus Home* (2024), and *The Prophet (Cassandra)* (2024). Their human scale and careful positioning within the exhibition space create an affective charge—like figures overseeing or gathering the works around them. They do not claim biographical specificity, yet they hold space in ways that suggest guardianship, memory, and social entanglement. Copper is an element that recurs in these sculptures, carrying symbolic and material resonance. In *The Surrogate*, copper piping rises from a domestic, carpeted base to support a pair of antlers adorned with tassels, suggesting ritual, a circuit, and interconnectedness. *To Serve and Protect* uses copper buttons, thread, and sheeting to bind a serving tray and draped artificial silk, connoting containment, care, and the thin boundary between protection and control. In *The Trappings of Power*, copper piping and tread plate elevate a wooden milkmaid's yoke, infusing an object of historical labour with ornamental tension. Meanwhile, in *Last Bus Home*, copper accents are embedded in assemblages of vinyl, crochet, and found objects, introducing a sharp contrast to otherwise fragile, nostalgic constructions. Across these works, copper's conductive and antimicrobial properties—as well as its tendency to tarnish and transform—mirror the sculptures' oscillation between strength and tenderness, ritual and residue.



The Prophet (Cassandra), 2024

A key series within the exhibition is *Feminist Escape Route*, a body of work that explores how the objects and actions of domesticity might be reimaged as escape strategies. Initially conceived in 2017 with a rope made from 50 meters of net curtain, this series expanded significantly during the COVID-19 lockdowns, reflecting on improbable means of escape and the tensions between confinement and resistance. Each work in the series suggests a failed or abandoned attempt at departure. *Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 6* (2021) features a typewriter repetitively printing “*To Whom it May Concern,*” evoking bureaucratic frustration and systemic deadlock. *Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 12* (2022) brings together an assemblage of materials—a pink hard hat, antlers, a cast of the artist’s teeth, and makeshift textiles—evoking disguise and transformation. The work draws visual and symbolic inspiration from the ritual costumes of European pagan festivals, particularly those from Eastern and Central Europe such as Perchten, an ancient Alpine folk tradition, and Busójárás in Hungary, where animal masks, antlers, pelts, and domestic textiles play a key role in rites of seasonal transition and collective protection. These traditions historically employed household fabrics—bedspreads, rugs, and worn clothing—to construct temporary identities that blurred human, animal, and spiritual boundaries.

Referencing these practices, the piece reflects on forms of both mythical and domestic entrapment, and the tension between concealment and visibility in gendered spaces. The use of repurposed domestic materials—in this case a nylon bedsheet—also gestures toward the histories of invisible women’s labour embedded in textiles—sewing, washing, covering, and caring—reframing them as tools of subversion rather than containment. Instead of appropriating these rituals, the work considers their strategies of masking and embodiment as conceptual tools for imagining escape within and beyond the domestic sphere. The *Feminist Escape Route* series as a whole disrupts the assumed stability of domestic space, repurposing mundane materials as tools of speculative escape. Many of the works incorporate handcrafted elements and the colour pink, consciously referencing the commodification of femininity.



**Feminist Escape Route:
Attempt No. 6, 2021**



**Feminist Escape Route:
Attempt No. 12, 2022**

Woman Trouble (2024) consists of a rusted, child-sized mattress frame propped against the wall, its surface threaded with pink cable ties that sprout like strange synthetic grass. Once discarded in an overgrown landscape, the frame now stands as a spectral remnant of domesticity gone awry. The use of cable ties—mundane yet ominous, employed both as household fasteners and instruments of restraint—evokes narratives of forced captivity and survival. Inspired by real-life cases of girls held hostage for years, the work questions how trauma materialises in everyday objects, and how ‘home’ can be both a site of refuge and one of prolonged entrapment.



Woman Trouble, 2024

Home Invasion (2024) juxtaposes fragility with resilience through a sculptural assemblage incorporating glass cocktail stirrers, a wooden frame, and a silicone baking mat printed with an image of *Carpobrotus edulis*, an ornamental plant that has become an invasive species in the UK. The work draws parallels between botanical migration and human displacement, highlighting the language of exclusion that marks both plants and people as ‘unwanted outsiders.’ The glass stirrers, originally decorative yet functionally unnecessary, form a partial screen—suggesting both a protective barrier and an ineffectual division. The plant’s ability to ‘jump the fence’ and thrive outside of its intended environment becomes a metaphor for resilience, adaptation, and the complexities of belonging.



Home Invasion, 2024

Chambers' *feral objects* refuse domestication. They resist assimilation into ordered, functional spaces and instead exist on the periphery of consumer culture, occupying a liminal space akin to flea markets and other sites of second-hand exchange—places where objects shift between states of value, use, and neglect. These transitional spaces disrupt conventional cycles of consumption and mirror the unruly presence of Chambers' sculptures, exposing the tenuous line between care and disuse, order and disarray. Working with collected and repurposed materials sourced across Europe, Chambers engages with the aesthetics of wear, transformation, and precarity, evoking the unstable nature of domestic life. Together, these works interrogate the tension between restriction and escape, domesticity and dispossession.

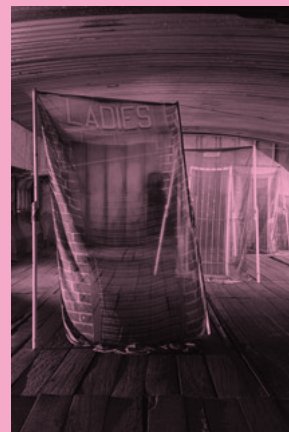
In *Body Works—Not My Voice, Not My Hair* these material-led investigations converge with the lived experience of inhabiting an aging female body. Works such as *Heart and Soul* (2024) and *Bulge* (2023) evoke corporeal presence through scale, texture, and material resonance, tracing how the female body is shaped by social, cultural, and psychological forces. These works materialise a shifting, ambivalent femininity—one that is both intimate and estranged, burdened and resilient—framing bodily experience as a site of tension and negotiation within feminist discourse.

Composed of digitally printed chiffon panels suspended from wooden batons, *Inconvenient Bodies* (2023) exists as a collection of transient objects, shifting between locations and configurations. At the Blenheim Walk Gallery, the panels hang from the ceiling, shifting and wafting with the air currents stirred by visitors, appearing almost alive in their movement. These translucent images—depicting abandoned or disused *ladies'* public toilets—hover between presence and absence, engaging with the politics of visibility and exclusion by reflecting on whose bodies are permitted to occupy public spaces. By travelling between cities and exhibition contexts, *Inconvenient Bodies* resists containment, existing in a state of ongoing adaptation, much like the lived experiences of those whose presence in public space is regulated, marginalized, or erased.



**Bulge, 2023 and
Heart and Soul, 2024**

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Inconvenient Bodies, 2023

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We are grateful to Angela Dimitrakaki for her insightful and thought-provoking contribution to this publication. Her critical rigor and profound engagement have provided valuable depth, enriching the discourse surrounding the themes of the exhibition. Truthful to her sharp intellect and unwavering commitment to materialist feminist critique, her essay is an invaluable addition to the project.

Special thanks to Ashleigh Armitage for her meticulous work in designing and organising this publication, and to RSS Press and Christopher Sand-Iversen for their indispensable support.

We acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the Blenheim Walk Gallery's International Advisory Board and Leeds Arts University, whose ongoing support has made this exhibition possible. Our sincere appreciation also goes to the Leeds Arts University 3D Workshops and Estates teams for their technical assistance in realising this exhibition.

A heartfelt thank you to Ruth Viccars, Curatorial Assistant, for her commitment to the ambitious vision of our programme.

Most importantly, we extend our deepest thanks to Paula Chambers for her generosity in sharing her practice with us.





Farm Girl (Window), 2024

The Trappings of Power, 2022





To Serve and Protect, 2023



Last Bus Home, 2024

Pulling Teeth, 2024



Home Invasion, 2024



Functional Overflow, 2024



Feminist Escape Route Attempt No. 14, 2022



Last Bus Home, 2024



Feminist Escape Route Attempt No. 12, 2022



The Surrogate (Ceremonial Object), 2024





Little Losses, 2024



Wired (Head Girl), 2025

Bad Faith, 2024



Material Nomads, 2023





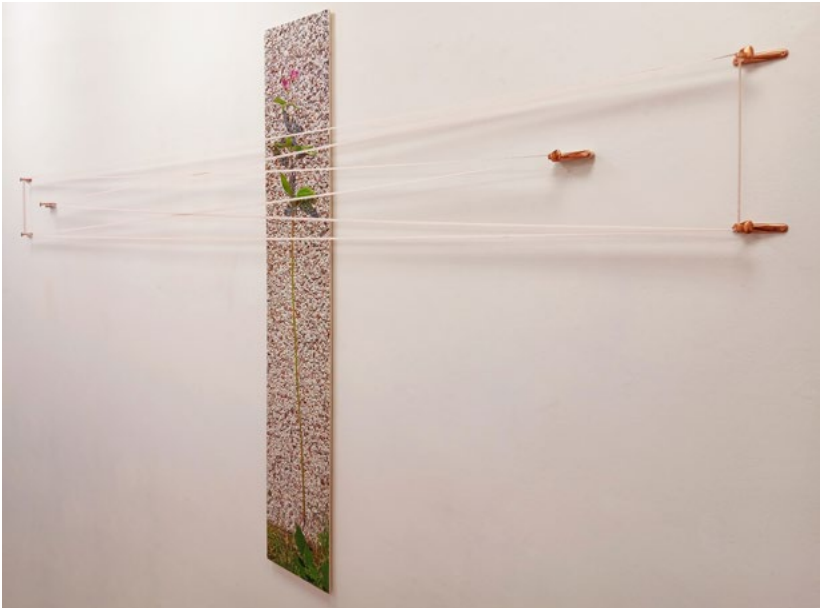
Feminist Escape Route Attempt No. 10, 2022



Hammerhead, 2024



Copper 'Ladies' (Venice), 2024



Jump, 2024



Feminist Escape Route Attempt No. 5, 2021



Bad Faith, 2024

The Prophet (Cassandra), 2024



Inconvenient Bodies, 2023



Inconvenient Bodies, 2023



Shop! Shop! Shop! (Blinds), 2024



Copper 'Ladies' (Venice), 2024



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Secret Keeper, 2025



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Last Bus Home, 2024



Material Nomads, 2023



Objects that Leave the Social Factory: Paula Chambers' Art of the Feral Possibility

ANGELA DIMITRAKAKI
2025

Material Nomads, 2023





Mimicking Menstruation
(detail), 2024

Paula Chambers is conscious of making art in a culture of obsolescence, junk and waste. This is a culture that has the appearance of being one of consumption. Yet behind consumption we find the ‘hidden abode of production’, sustained and reproduced by the hidden abode of reproduction. One of the most notable features of capitalism as a mode of production, but also a totalising—and already for decades, global—system of social relations, was its transformation of the family, attached to domesticity, from a unit of production to a unit of consumption. The domestic ceased being a place and time where things were made for direct use, and instead became filled with purchased commodities which straddled the realm of needs and that of desires. Needs and desires became inextricable and blended into a world of industrially produced objects, the distribution of which across radically varied domestic spaces would signal affluence or dearth. Yet the existence of the objects that transitioned from sites of production to those of reproduction has been a ubiquitous fact. The realm of reproduction, feminists observed, was where women realised their socially assigned, hidden from public view non-work as the proverbial ‘labour of love’, but, besides this, it was a space-time continuum that feminised, and thus devalued, anything that entered it. Objects that enter a domestic space instituted in feminised terms are symbols of non-agency. In the first instance, Paula Chambers’ feminist imaginary is one that traces the lives of these objects—forever at risk of pacification in the kingdom of nostalgia—and plans tentative escapes for them. Her art is where such objects enter the feral state of being: plucked out of their domestic use-value that would conceal their exchange-value as commodities, these objects are reprocessed through a feminist unarchiving of the domestic order.

Often in Chambers’ art, such objects encounter organic remains—an animal’s antlers, the branch of a tree. In such cases, the artwork undoes the habitual taxonomy of nature-culture, but chaos does not ensue. Those ‘frozen’ encounters of the organic and the inorganic are often punctuated by distance between the materials. In *The Surrogate (Ceremonial Object)* (2024) the antler is balanced atop a brass rod that stands on a pedestal. The too-beautiful floral carpet looks overused, and the antler is hung with pink tassels suitable for curtains but also for the sexualised embellishment of a human breast. The tassels are attached to the points of the antler, the distance between them marked by the shape of the testosterone-generated bone, which is what an antler is. With the exception of the female reindeer, antlers are an attribute of male deer used in fighting and the display of domination. *The Surrogate (Ceremonial Object)* presents an antler that will not be used in any more fights. It will not be a huntsman’s trophy either. It has been appropriated, with bitter irony perhaps, into the ceremony that feminist artmaking as such is. Feminist artmaking claims feminisation as a positive process, but the violence that this process may still require is here emphasised. Chambers’ art is run through with delicate, sometimes nearly imperceptible, reminders of the violence that dwells in art’s handling of matter in a world where the artist is instructed to approach that matter as a source of ‘ready-mades’. It offers no safe positions for the feminist art act.

I borrow this phrase from a book introduced by Virginia Woolf and published by the Co-operative Working Women in the interwar period. The book offers shocking accounts of working-class women's realities of servitude.

See Co-operative Working Women, *Life as We Have Known It*, ed. by Margaret Llewelyn Davies (London: Virago, 1977 [1931]).

This can be observed in *Inconvenient Bodies* (2024), as the title of another, life-size sculpture has it—which addresses the spectrality of a social code once known as the ‘ladies’ toilet’, a convention that has been challenged. But turn a corner and ‘life as we have known it’ lurks: a vintage artificial silk curtain refashioned as the skirt of a gown is held upright, in place, by large copper-covered buttons and a copper sheet. The spectral woman’s torso is a ‘verticalised’ serving tray. This is *To Serve and Protect* (2023), a title that shares a questioning of this widespread police motto’s monopoly of legal violence, and of what the patriarchal regime’s women were promised, protection, in exchange for servitude.

Chambers’ art materialises as what I would call *narrative feminist sculpture*—sculpture that performs a certain story-telling about the points of tension in living as a woman in specific historical conditions. This ‘living’ was populated by objects that concealed their industrial and thus *political* origins and assumed the cloak of the *personal* in signifying individual identities. Acrylic hair, for example, could be attached to a human head to enhance certain expectations that were personally lived out. In *Last Bus Home* (2024), acrylic hair is attached to the branch of a tree that hangs over an ensemble of domestic objects, which connote femininity through the colour pink but also through evocative shapes: the reconstruction of a two-tier lean-and-narrow table using the lower part of a flapper dress, so popular in the 1920s when the New Woman had to have freedom of movement to dance while remaining sexualised; the light, elaborately crocheted covers placed on translucent glass paper weights, both decorative and useful. There is no ‘bus’ to be seen in the sculpture; the deluge of pinkness and the clash of lightness and heaviness are of the ‘home’. The work’s title alludes to the drama of the inevitable return home after a dance-filled night out, appropriate for a girl in search of thrills but less so for an older woman whose life is marked by duties. *Last Bus Home* narrativises the inter-generational conflict built of expectations that remain in the feminine zone and possibly even the feminist life. The juxtaposition of plastic (acrylic) and nature (branch) oversees the drama, as if calling to all matter embedded in the sculpture to reveal its hidden origins in nature, but also its eventual role (after its industrial capture) in conferring an *aesthetic* on women’s contemporary lives as a back-and-forth condition: exodus and return. The lean-and-narrow, two-tier folding table, easily tucked aside and made inconspicuous, is one of a series of human-scale industrial objects that Chambers has perceptively compared, in her writings, to women. Like these commodities of the everyday, women are expected to not take up much space, either physically or discursively.² *Last Bus Home* can be destroyed in the blink of an eye by folding the table, and it renews the feminist lineage of *precarious* sculpture practised as a theatre of the often subtly oppressed:³ those who are told that they fantasise their own oppression.

Numerous such subjects appear in the present moment of modernity: subjects whose subjugation is effected through forms of capture that are neither exclusively delivered through coercion, nor can be easily undone. These subjects can never tell if it is they who change or their world. They—we—seem to inhabit an elusive context where attempts to exit are already entries into the fabricated.

Paula Chambers, ‘Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance: Activating Feral Materiality’, in Basia Sliwinska, ed., *Feminist Visual Activism and the Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020). The chapter discusses Chambers’ film of this title.

Chilean artist and poet Cecilia Vicuña started her *precarios* made of humble, random materials in the 1960s, when she coined the term Precarious Art. In the early 1970s, her precarious works would become the fragments of Chile’s lost hope as the junta brutally displaced Allende’s left government.

Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).

Against second wave feminism’s emphasis on the perpetual constructedness of the social, Chambers examines the preconstructed. What takes place before the construction of social relations becomes possible? Chambers’ take on nature as image facilitated through the advances of capitalist chemistry—the ‘synthetic worlds’ that Esther Leslie described twenty years ago as underpinning the rise of modern art⁴—is built through the allusions of repurposing. *Home Invasion* (2024) exemplifies this attachment to the repurposing of familiar objects by using glass cocktail stirrers in the guise of window-like structure through which we can look, as if imprisoned, at nature printed on vinyl. Chambers enacts multiple iterations of an optics of the artificial through which the exodus is dreamed. A series of ‘feminist escape routes’ charts the frustration of the feminist struggle in the realm of fabrication as much as the impossibility of giving up that struggle, for the tools for the latter appear to exist: the ‘obedient’ objects that surround us can be repurposed as aids of refusal. It is the know-how that must be obtained.

Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 6 (2021) returns to the obsolete typewriter and the materiality of stacked A4 sheets of paper placed on a table, next to which awaits a suitcase rendered in fluorescent pink pebbledash. The tools are present but who has made them? And to what effect? Lauren Berlant’s queering of optimism (by which I mean, making it strange) as ‘cruel’ in the long, crisis-shadowed 2010s, was a means of interrogating the illusions that underpin the mass attachment to a ‘good life’. Cruel optimism, in Judith Butler’s words, is the condition of “oscillation between manic exhilaration and devastating disappointment bound up with contemporary neoliberalism wherein the inflated expectations of what life could be are repeatedly disappointed”.⁵ Chambers’ narrative feminist sculpture presents escape routes that we don’t know if someone took, but the artist herself certainly did in her long-term project of insurgent melancholy premised on the potential of objects to escape. Chambers invents a feminist aesthetic founded on a radical reinterpretation of ‘deindustrialisation’: ferality as an agential return of the domesticated commodity to the wild. But this is an imagined condition, for these objects’ return to the wild can never be accomplished beyond the barrier of pollution and toxicity. The only available, surrogate ‘wild’ is therefore the work of art, which the objects enter as narrative devices of the dialectic between possibility and impossibility, flight and re-enclosure.

What is a ‘good life’ for a feminist exposing the consistency of domesticity’s intimate objects? The consistency of intimate objects is dual: they tend to be firm/solid, but they are also consistent in pulling us into privatised lives as the articulation of a good life. As I read on the internet about Berlant’s questioning of the good life, a film ad showing a ‘robot-bunny’ hopping on a cosy domestic floor ‘as a perfect gift for Easter’ distracts my attention. Where can the robot-bunny escape—safely for nature’s bunnies—if not in the ‘structure of feeling’⁶ where we find the plastic tubing of Chambers’ *Heart and Soul* (2024) and the nylon bedsheet of her *Feminist Escape Route No. 12* (2022)? Against the history-blind unrealist animism of much new materialism that flattens out critical distinctions in a velvet soup of ‘matter’, Chambers posits the narrative sculptural work as a process

Judith Butler in “What Would It Mean to Think that Thought?: The Era of Lauren Berlant”, *The Nation*, 8 July 2021, www.thenation.com/article/culture/lauren-berlant-obituary

See also Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

Raymond Williams coined this term in the 1950s, seeking to describe what especially the arts can reveal about a historically specific social experience that crosses through ordinary life. The term has found multiple uses in contemporary cultural criticism.

of differentiation, but also proximity where materials are concerned. Juxtapositions of organic and inorganic have a long history in art, yet Chambers enacts a dialectic of potentiality where human agency (the labour of art) acknowledges that its tentative autonomy relies on the capture of matter first enacted elsewhere (in social relations). In this light, the feral possibility conferred on matter is a politics of transversal justice, crossing through the human and non-human. Chambers’ feminist lens, trained on what enters the domestic sphere of late extractive modernity as need-desire, and typically exits it as waste, delivers a *Prophet: Cassandra* (2024) where a projector stand wears a short, black nette tulle and lifts its artificial beak in a striking instance of ornithomorphism. It is but impossible to unsee the raven as the work’s sculptural effect; its mythological association to shapeshifting informs a prophecy about the enforced transmutations of nature as material culture necessary for our object-filled world to take shape.

In closing this short essay, which hardly touches the depths of the structure of feeling Chambers’ work hints at, I need to get politically personal: Paula Chambers and I were young adults in the 1990s, a transitional decade for art and society alike in which postfeminism swept the western mediascape like the new purple. What on earth was postfeminism? you may ask, observing the anti-feminist backlash of the 2020s. Postfeminism was an order we were given by dominant ideology. We were ordered to behave *as if* feminism had achieved its aims and was itself a feminised idea soon to be discarded in the dustbin of history. It was a popular idea in the western art institution, marked by shows where young women artists rode the wave of ‘babe power’⁷ within an expanding, technologically-fuelled visual culture where ‘woman’ and ‘commodity’ were becoming more of a tautology than even in the 1970s. Not all of us obliged. A minority remained unconvinced—inspired, if that’s the word, by the persistent clash of our lives as women and our cultural labour. Feminism continued in the art field after 2000, yet things were different. There was no feminist art movement and there were no collective oppositional structures, however fragile these had been. In a working context devoid of consciousness-raising meetings, artistic labour became itself the process of maintaining feminist consciousness, and attention to materials became all the more politically significant.

Chambers would gradually take things further than attention to materials: she would deploy materials as parts of a ‘feminist strategy’ *around* but not confined to domesticity. She would return to the ordinariness of material culture and seek to reconfigure it as agential. Agency would enter a cycle: it could start with the commodities structuring domesticity, continue with their dismantling in the home-studio-life, and end up in the artwork as the output of intense, de-fetishising feminist labour. The series of words in Chambers’ exhibition title illuminates this intention. *Still. Stray. Stowaway*. In Chambers’ artmaking, stillness as an illusory property of matter is set in motion. The objects can go astray, leaving the familiar and the familial. The migration of the objects turns into a journey that is public in form and yet clandestine in its political potentiality: art.

How to speak of feminism in unfeminist times? The stowaway objects in Paula Chambers’ art narrativise the uncertainty and losses that pile up as the feminist subject moves forward while she must necessarily keep looking back—killing the ‘angel in the house’ in an effort to join the angel of her own history, to repurpose here Walter Benjamin’s resonant metaphor.⁸ Chambers’ sculptural improbabilities surprise us in their refusal to abide by feminism’s social entropy. They carry the wisdom of the used, the abused, and the disused, of that which was made to disintegrate but is instead drawn into a philosophical enquiry: is it true that “even the least gestures of everyday life—anything at all that an individual may experience is placed within the reach of everyone else”⁹ in our contemporary moment? In an earlier modernity, in 1895, Louis Lumière filmed *Workers Leaving the Factory*. This was in a rapidly industrialised Europe, and most of the workers seen to be exiting the factory were women. Later, in the twentieth century, the factory spread or at least became legible as a social form—the ‘social factory’ became another word for society.¹⁰ Domesticity and its objects of concealed industrial origins, behind which the plundering of nature also hides, provided a key mechanism for reproducing this social factory day in, day out. Chambers’ feminist narrative sculpture asks: is it time to open the gates of the social factory? Yes, it is, and we’ll follow the wandering objects as fetishes that demand liberation. Vectors of privatised experience—in Chambers’ art the objects of the social factory—, these solid ‘gestures of everyday life’ are no longer within reach. Their formal derealisation is art’s politics of solidarity with the feminist lives that want to be lived.

7
Indicatively, see Barbara Pollack, ‘Babe Power’, *Art Monthly* 235 (April 2000), www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/babe-power-by-barbara-pollack-april-2000

8
Prior to defining an ideal of woman’s domesticity and an argument about the separate spheres of public and private, as well as becoming the title of photographs and films, *Angel in the House* was an 1859 poem by Coventry Patmore that described this condition as positive for the man who is the beneficiary of women’s care in the home. Walter Benjamin wrote his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, where the image of the angel of history appears, in 1940, shortly before he would try to escape Nazism by fleeing to Spain.

9
Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Exform* (London: Verso, 2016 [2015], p.75.

10
Informing many Marxist and materialist feminist readings of social reproduction in its historicity, the notion of the ‘social factory’ originates in Italian Autonomist Marxism and refers to how the relations and values that are essential in the factory do not remain in this site of production but spill out, permeating all social spheres. The social factory can be traced in Mario Tronti, ‘Factory and Society’ (1962), in Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital*, trans. David Broder (London: Verso, 2019).

Biographies

Paula Chambers is an artist, academic and arts educator. She has exhibited widely, including solo exhibitions *Not My Voice*, *Not My Hair* at Stone Space Gallery, London, *Inconvenient Bodies* at Hošek Contemporary, Berlin, *Working Girls* at The Whitaker, and *Not at Home* at the Art House, Wakefield. A forthcoming exhibition *Now You See Her*, *Now You Don't* will open at Bury Sculpture Centre in September 2025.

In June 2023 she undertook *Material Nomads: a feral artist intervention* for Momentum 12 in Moss, Norway, an art working strategy subsequently developed for sites in Lisbon, Warsaw and Riga.

Paula is Associate Professor at Leeds Arts University, teaching the BA course in Fine Art. She has presented at national and international conferences on feminism, contemporary art and the domestic, is co-editor of the book *Wearable Objects and Curative Things: Material Approaches to the Intersections of Fashion, Art, Health and Medicine*, and of *Going Feral: Speculative Approaches to Animism in the Arts* to be published in late 2025. She has chapters included in *Feminist Art Activisms and Artivisms*, *Feminist Visual Activism and the Body*, and in *An Artist and a Mother*. She also has articles published in *Parse Journal*, the *Journal of Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, and in *Performance/Research Journal* (special issue On the Maternal).



Vanishing, 2022

Angela Dimitrakaki is a writer and art historian. She is Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Edinburgh, where she directs the MSc in Modern and Contemporary Art: History, Curating & Criticism.

Angela is the author of numerous chapters and articles on aesthetics and politics, globalisation and modernity, labour, social class, feminism, the lens, art as social practice, technology and ideology.

She is a Corresponding Editor of Historical Materialism and an Editor of *Third Text*, where she initiated and co-edited the special issues on social reproduction (2017) and antifascism (2019). Her books include *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative* (2013), *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (2013, co-edited with L. Perry), *Art and Globalisation: From the Postmodern Sign to the Biopolitical Arena* (2013, in Greek), *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject in the 21st Century* (2015, co-edited with K. Lloyd), *Depression Era: A Collective Lens in the Age of Crisis* (2025, co-edited with A. Strecker) and *Feminism. Art. Capitalism.* forthcoming from Pluto Press in the autumn of 2025.

Marianna Tsionki is a curator and theorist working at the intersection of contemporary art, ecology and technology. She is Associate Professor & University Curator at Leeds Arts University, where she oversees Curatorial Programmes, Collections and Archives Management and Library Operations.

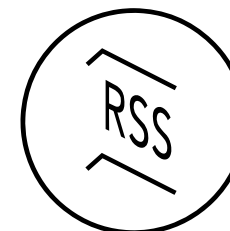
Her curatorial projects and writing examine the evolving social and ecological transformations of the Anthropocene, global ecologies of resource extraction, and humanity's post-industrial relationship with nature. Her current research project focuses on decolonial eco-visualities, eco-feminist practices, and local ecological knowledge, with a forthcoming book *We Live Like Trees Inside the Footsteps of Our Ancestors* (Berlin: K. Verlag, summer of 2025).

Her writing features in several edited volumes, exhibition catalogues and peer-reviewed journals, published by Sternberg, Palgrave Macmillan, Wetlands, and dpr-barcelona. Among her curated projects are the exhibitions *Liminal Ecologies* at Tranzit.sk, Bratislava (2025), *Oliver Ressler: Hothouse Planet Breakout* at Blenheim Walk Gallery, Leeds (2024), *Marwa Arsanios: Who is Afraid of Ideology?* at Blenheim Walk Gallery, Leeds (2022), *Kyriaki Goni: Networks of Trust* at SixtyEight Art Institute, Copenhagen (2022), and *Meteorological Mobilities* at Apexart, NYC (2020).



Paula Chambers
Still. Stray. Stowaway.
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