

The Cunt Tavern

curated by Anthony Auerbach and Marlene Haring

The Function Room, London

8 March–8 May 2016

Catalogue

The Cunt Tavern

Apparently, Jacques Lacan owned Gustave Courbet's painting *L'origine du monde* (1866) and kept it behind a wooden screen which his wife's sister's husband and patriarchal confrère, André Masson decorated with a calligraphic replica. The apparatus preserved the painting—and in turn the original 'lack' it represented, according to the psychoanalyst—from sight and dramatised the moment the owner chose to pull back the screen and reveal his property: an image it took some courage to paint, though the inequality between painter and model could not be starker; an image whose challenge to the male viewer, bound to complicity in the painting's violence, is delivered by its title and concentrated at its vanishing point; an image of a hairy vagina, kept as the secret locus of erotic terror, the body of the mother, mutilated and held captive.

The Cunt Tavern is a group exhibition curated by Anthony Auerbach and Marlene Haring at The Function Room. The Function Room is a space for contemporary art founded by the curators upstairs at The Cock Tavern in Somers Town. The Cock is a traditional male preserve, being the last pub remaining in the neighbourhood and one of the last surviving working-class locals anywhere in London.

The Cunt Tavern opened on 8 March 2016, celebrating International Women's Day with cabaret at The Cock Tavern (organised in co-operation with Carnesky Productions and the Radical Anthropology Group as the after party for the performance of *Carnesky's Incredible Bleeding Woman*) and asserting the reversal of male dominance, feminist intelligence and humour with works by Anča Daučíková, Manuela Gernedel, Marlene Haring, Sophie von Hellerman, Abigail Jones, Katrin Plavčák, Alexander Brener & Barbara Schurz and Eva Stenram.

The exhibition announcement had a warning: Contains explicit works without obvious subtleties. Partly, perhaps, because an attempt to go beyond the vulgarity and directness of the title with conceptual self-justification would likely miss the point; partly because making an ostentatious show of subtlety is in bad taste; partly because what you see is what you get.

False Friend (In Your Face)

Between the labia, for that is what they are and what they resemble, an opening runs down, a crack between crinkled lips. Tight at the top, meandering, widening at the bottom, creating all at once an abyss, a wry smile and an invitation. Plump and glossy lips crossed by lifelines give way to a border forested by hairs in winter colours, blacks and browns, greys and whites, looping, thick and wiry. A moist and bristly curtain almost parted. An entrance or an exit. To whom is this friend false? Who is deceived by its similarity? That is not pubic hair but it might be. That is not a vulva but it might be. That is a man's bearded mouth but it might not be. The thing looms taller than you. You could have just come out of its warm, moist interior. You could walk right in to it.

Vagina (series)

Four of them hanging at cunt height. Hung up at head height, they would be aureoles, coloured auras and radiant halos, or rather mandorle, almond-shaped cartouches as if to envelop and uplift a whole holy body. But you have to look down to see:

Firstly, waxy, crimson pigment gathering over a golden and blue background, flesh folding inwards to a ridge and another ridge and then a hole, darkening to blue for a moment, then another fold of red and a deeper hole reflecting white at its centre.

Secondly, chaos of purples, blues and greens, orange hairs and shadowy blacks. A mandorla in the middle invites your stare, framed in red, above it turquoise leaf-shapes as if ovaries, a scratchy almond-eye at the centre as if spying the way out from the inside.

Thirdly, a darker ground, blue-cloaked but no virgin Mary. Blueish glacial water spilling, later, remoter.

Fourthly, an oval swirl of daybreak or sunset pink and blue, red, green, yellow, dilating to reveal a luminous centre and a darker slit.

And so it goes on, in series, a post-partum document of the absurdest painting, repeatedly the same motif, every time a different subject, an undetermined sequence, a growing society of cunts.

Шланг (Hose)

A mustard-yellow sky topped with olive-coloured clouds, Vs flying for birds and a setting copper sun. A red brick building with six chimneys at the horizon could be a school, a factory, a slaughterhouse. On either side, blasted trees, stakes or broken fences look down on a field full of flowers (poppies, roses, pansies, daisies, chrysanthemums, hyacinths) and shit. A dead world now in bud. In the centre, a naked woman, head thrown back, long black hair, mouth open. The nipples of her jutting breasts are fuchsia pink and her hairy vulva appears to be giving a fiery birth to the flowers between her large and dirty feet. The hose with which she is dancing, with which she is struggling, snakes in from her right, twisting and kinking. An ecstatic hippie Laocoön. You think back to El Greco’s Laocoön (c. 1610–14), the wooden gift-horse trotting towards his home-town Troy in the distance above the writhing bodies. Trapped beneath her left foot and grasped in her hands, the hose arches up and spurts water over her face and hair, drenching her head in a blue watercolour wash.

Beating Around the Bush

A body sprawls in broad, quick strokes across a two-metre canvas, like a hazy fairytale giant astride reddish earth in front of a blue sky, or maybe sky blue wallpaper. A girl as big as the world. Her fair hair brushed in blue, her feathery lashed eyes are closed in concentration, elbows jutting out, in her blurry hands she holds drumsticks with which she beats rhythmically the knot of vegetation in front of her bush. You can hear the beats loudly, resonating deeply.

Die Prinzessin auf der Erbse (The Princess and the Pea)

A woman reclines on an antique yellow-and-blue-striped sofa, staged by red and gold curtains which she lifts and parts with her right foot to disclose a radiant poo, vapours rising as the drapes fall. She wears only a white bathroom slipper on her left foot. Knees up and black pubes peeping. Her hair is blond, eyes blue, cheeks pink, lips full red, teeth sticking out, one breast visible: a nipple target for your eye. Look at her looking at you. She rests her neck on a white, fringed pillow. From her right elbow extends a long, ink-blot forearm, black, like Olympia’s startled cat and kind maid. Black tentacle fingers reach to the middle of an elaborately patterned rug lying before her, a system of circles bordering squares containing labyrinths, heads and skulls, human and other.

Mimi de Paris

An elaborate carpet or fantastic garden decorated with red firebirds, flowers and sunbursts: in the middle, a green rug, a walled garden or floral bed. On it reclines a naked woman, looking out at you. She is wearing gold and silver high-heeled pumps. Her face and pencilled hair are yellow paper coloured, her cheeks are flushed, her hands support her breasts, her knees are up, her legs are open. The pornographic, gynaecological, obstetric, provocative pose presents her open, red-lipped, hairy cunt from which extends a black, gourd-shaped shadow, emerging or penetrating, signalling to you. This cunt is talking to you!

Femmage to Georgia

Oval portrait painting in ice cream hues. A gap surrounded by fresh pink and flesh-coloured flesh. A paintbrush menstruating ice cream. You guess pink is strawberry flavoured, the flesh-tint is vanilla. At the top of the delta formed by the thighs are daubs of brown: pubic hairs, paint brush bristles. Descending from that point, a dark stroke suggests a flow, a paint brush handle, lolly stick, a stamen reaching to a swirled green and white pool, calyx. This cunt is a painter!

Queen’s Finger

You are watching a standard definition do-it-yourself video. You find it more comfortable to sit down as you watch a thumb stroke the fingers of a hand. The hand and thumb glisten. This could be demonstrating something you are not sure what. The hand holds a glass object, an optical device. You watch. The hairs and pores of the skin are clearly visible. The thumb strokes the base of the glass object and then moves to the rim exploring the edge, caressing and rubbing. The thumb then moves inside the glass object from behind and rubs the inner surface. Faster then slower, agitated then gentle. The hand does not appear to know it is being observed. The thumb moves attentively inside, around, then across and back, stroking the lens-like object, rubbing and caressing. Between skin and glass it makes a sticking-slipping sound, grating and then soothing, over the faint whine of the tape transport mechanism. You look away, then back. Hypocrite voyeur. The noise increases, makes smooth surfaces sound abrasive. The faster and more violently the thumb rubs, the harder the sound. The slower and more gently the thumb strokes, the softer the sound. Then silent.

Pelzig! (Furry!)

Centred on the small, dark pit of the navel in the middle of a pale woman’s bare abdomen. Cyclopean eye in a wall. The paper torso is cut off below the ribs, below the hips, arms detached. Below her waist, her body is covered by deep-red tights. Her left arm reaches down and is joined by her other hand (pale pink nail polish) cradling a grey, cut-out hand mirror in front of the gold-chained, sparkling black purse that obscures her sex. The grey mirror reflects, in shades of grey, a hairy vagina. Before the mirror, in shades of grey, a hairy pubic mount and grasping its handle, a grey, meander-veined right hand.

Butterfly

A red gladiolus stands out against a blue background. The flower’s anthers hover on filaments below the long-styled stigma emerging from a deep red cavity. Reaching towards them, the feelers of an iridescent butterfly with fashionably unmatched wings, front pair dark blue, striped with greens, hind pair burgundy and white with a spillage of turquoise green. A coy fan veiling the flower’s opening. A rectangle without colour is stuck over the butterfly’s abdomen. Grey pubic hairs merging with the wings’ veins attach the wings instead to a human vulva, lips parted, about to fly.

Drape

Two old photographs, pocket size, of a woman posing in front of brownish pink curtains, heavy and theatrical. Open-toed platforms, worn jeans ironed with a crease, bare arms. Left, three-quarter view, right hip towards the camera, shoulders slightly hunched, thumbs pocketed in the open fly, fingers framing her crotch. Right, frontal, fly zipped and buttoned above the belly button, hands on hips, cocky pose. You imagine the eyes, her look, because her head and topless body have been draped by the curtains surging unexpectedly from behind her.

Lex Talionis

Two girls in a room, sisters, probably. In the background are outlines of arches as if sketched on a wall as a makeshift exit. The floor is brown. In the middle, a blue-green rug. To the right stands a blue, lidded vase on a pedestal table, the shadows of vase and table thrown on the wall behind. Bottom, right, something white with yellow and black designs: another rug, the corner of a table, perhaps, laid with knives. On a deep-red upholstered couch, one of the girls reclines. She has dark hair, dark eyes and wears a yellow t-shirt, a pale-blue unbuttoned blouse and a grey skirt, no socks, black shoes. She lounges in a pose out of another painting, her left leg on the seat of the couch, her right foot barely touching the floor, skirt draping her parted legs. She holds a strip of pale rag in her right hand while her left arm reaches behind her head resting on a golden pillow. She looks at her sister, or her younger self, sitting on the edge of the blue-green rug on the floor. She looks like her sister: dark hair, dark eyes, white top, green skirt, white socks, black shoes. They look calmly intent on something. Neither seems to care about the shadow entering the scene.

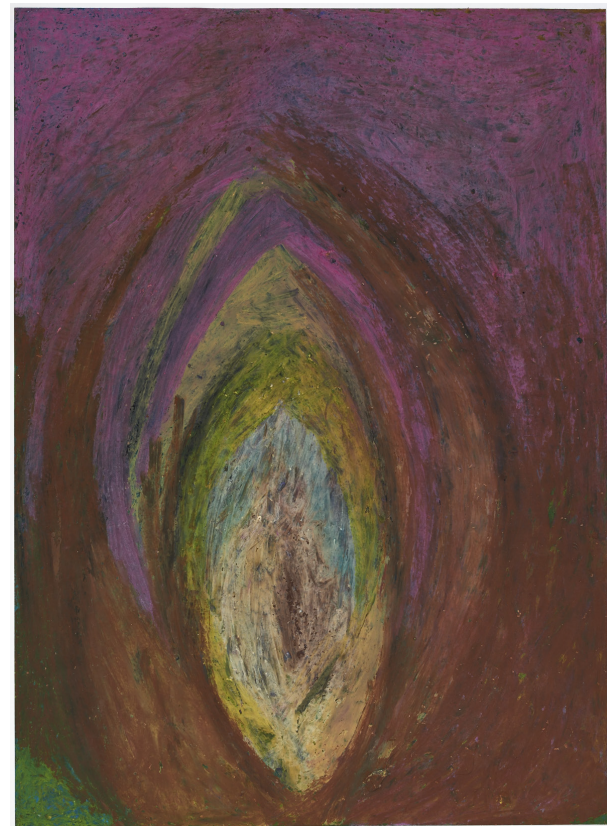
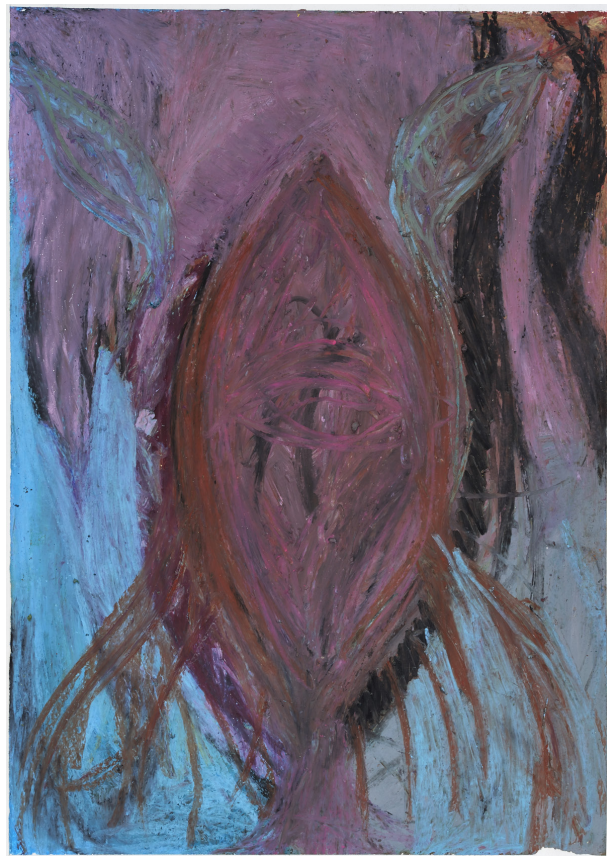
Works in the Exhibition

- 1 Marlene Haring, *False Friend (In Your Face)*
backlit photograph, 182 × 238 × 15 cm, 2012/16
- 2 Manuela Gernedel, *Vagina* (series)
oil pastel on paper, each 40 × 60 cm, 2012
- 3 Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz, *Шланг (Hose)*
gouache on paper, 204 × 295 mm, 2015
- 4 Sophie von Hellermann, *Beating Around the Bush*
oil on canvas, 200 × 160 cm, 2015
- 5 Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz, *Der Prinzessin auf der Erbse (The Princess and the Pea)*
gouache on paper, 204 × 295 mm, 2014
- 6 Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz, *Mimi de Paris*
gouache on paper, 209 × 295 mm, 2014
- 7 Sophie von Hellermann, *Femmage to Georgia*
oil on canvas, 30 × 40 cm, 2015
- 8 Anča Daučíková, *Queen’s Finger*
video, 3 m 41 s, 1998
- 9 Katrin Plavčák, *Pelzig! (Furry!)*
collage, 202 × 264 mm, 2012
- 10 Katrin Plavčák, *Butterfly*
collage, 175 × 252 mm, 2012
- 11 Eva Stenram, *Drape (BF 1)*
C-type Lambda print, each image 85 × 107 mm, 2013
- 12 Abigail Jones, *Lex Talionis*
oil on canvas, 152 × 122 cm, 2016



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An Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotsman walk into The Cunt Tavern ...

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