

Reviving Female Perspectives

# Touch Sensitive

*After Nyne meets*

Cairo Clarke

WORDS · LEAH ABRAHAM

TOUCH SENSITIVE





Contemporary curator, **Cairo Clarke** positions much of her curator's research and practice into cultivating "progressive curatorial approaches", engaged in "challenging the norms in art institutions".

Her first forays into curation began back in 2015 when working with **Sang Bleu Art Space** in Dalston, for a season of shows and residencies. Since then, Clarke has collaborated and coordinated a varied roster of young, emerging artists on projects including **TPS X BOLD TENDENCIES** (2016) summer programme, assisted and hosted a number of art events in spots like CHELSEA SPACE and further afield. In March, she was warmly welcomed as a guest speaker at W Project 'Women in Art' symposium, hosted by Tate Exchange, and went on to be publicly accredited as a boundary-pushing 'newcomer' curator.

Working to bring about a newly revised consensus of the contemporary art landscape, from its younger creative practitioners. Clarke uses her curator's

practice to create openly, fluid channels for wider dialogue and engagement. "From the beginning it's about creating something different, having other voices heard." Clarke is certainly a busy lady, and scheduling a virtual chat with her one warm Wednesday evening didn't come so easy. By forging a counterpoint to the monolithic backdrop of the 'pale, male and stale' art landscape, Clarke talks me through about her most recent co-curatorial adventure; TOUCH SENSITIVE. Her fascination with female performance art as protest, and looking retrospectively at Women's Art Magazine back issues from the 90's, which helped to birth a "rhizomatic" and responsive concept for artists to work with. "I spent a lot of time writing the Press release, devising the concept and offering a platform for artists to explore. I always wanted to test it an exhibition space and see how it would come about." She speaks softly, in tinkled tones almost serenely, through her words are informed and assiduous.

Taking place from 21st - 26th March, as part of **Yinka Shonibare's** 'Guest Projects' initiative. TOUCH SENSITIVE unfolded into a weeklong series of events, presenting artist perspectives of the female body, and bodies in conjunction with the internet. Inviting 6 female artists to share performance space, and respond to the concept devised by Clarke. The project aimed to unravel ideas about how the artist in performance visualised their ideas and organised their focus through performance. But also sought to examine how, we as audience members, collaborators and voyeurs of the performance came to occupy the body of public space. Touching upon TOUCH SENSITIVE as immersive, Clarke disagrees and puts that "the parameters of each artist having the space for one day meant that the way things worked with the public required their engagement of some kind." "There was this fluidity and experimentation that allowed everyone to take up space as and how they liked." Collaborating with performance artists **Harriet Middleton-Baker, Hannah Perry, Suzannah Pettigrew** and **Nikola Vasakova** of 'Girls in Film'. Clarke rekindled partnerships with interdisciplinary artist **Suzannah Pettigrew**, and performance artist **Diana Chire**, both she had previously met and worked with. Clarke writes on the Press Release 'The body can be imagined as a database, a store accessible in various ways.' During our conversation, she reveals to me that TOUCH SENSITIVE came about as a back project inspired, by a Reading Room that Clarke had co-curated at CHELSEA SPACE, using back issues of the Women's Art Magazine in the 90's. Female artists and visionaries of the WAM adopted a feminist and utopian conception of the Internet, as a newly emerging phenomenon for women to liberate themselves from their bodies, and from gendered oppressions that were cast onto them. "There were specific issues from the 90's, looking at how women can claim agency through the internet. How the internet can be a free space." With London's first internet cafe CYBERIA establishing in 1994 as a woman only venture, teaching women how to use the internet. Women foresaw the conception of virtual and

online spaces as a domain, "where women can claim agency over themselves, their bodies" reveals Clarke. With that in mind, how did Clarke take to interpreting the artistic conceptions of the internet? "It was interesting to read their thoughts and hopes for the future and live it now. It was interesting to hear how the internet could be space for women to join and create communities online, at the time everything seemed distinctly separate. There was a distinction between cyberspace and reality." TOUCH SENSITIVE she offers, was about re-opening the performance space, to live out vicariously what had before been predicted. To focus the lense on contemporary ideas and notions from our current generation of artists.

'The first space we occupy to the fullest is our body, a space of which we should be able to claim agency. What meaning do we attach to it? How does it function socially, politically, sexually IRL and online?' taken from Press Release

TOUCH SENSITIVE focused on the intersecting discourse between the curator concept, the artist's process and output. Speaking on the concept of space Clarke explains "It's not about ownership of the space, it's about shared space, a shared load. For me, as a contemporary curator, I think it's important to work in this way because you can get a lot more out of it." As a symposium of live performances, each twilight event of TOUCH SENSITIVE felt uniquely like an instance/output of the artist's creative process. And in that, progressions were still continuing to develop. "It was a big kind of experimenting ground. For me, it was a 'testing-out' of ideas, and for everyone involved." And with most of the evenings indicating BYOB, audience interactions and conversations would flow until late hours. Clarke placed a clear emphasis on the artist interacting with their audience. "That was part of the point, there were many layers. It wasn't about being decisive, or certain. I wanted TOUCH SENSITIVE to be a basis of experimenting with ideas and sharing them" she clarifies. Each female artist fissioned the body into separate complexities; from coils of the hair, to the physical body, repositioning physical sexuality and bodily interactions with music through dance. Beneath is a brief recap outlining each artist's focus and their performance/installation.

PREVIOUS SPREAD:  
A BODY LIKE NO OTHER,  
Diana Chire

LEFT PAGE:  
TOUCH SENSITIVE 4,  
Suzannah Pettigrew,  
Credit Tilley Harris

Tuesday — Hannah Perry

**ACT 1**

Multi-medium opening artist transformed the Guests project into a stage, inviting TOUCH SENSITIVE audience to Vee Slinky's rehearsal performance. Providing commentary on our double standard gender politics, the combination of audio recordings of Perry, intermeshed with Vee Slinky sensual movements looked at how to reconcile our conditioned ideas around female sexuality, and our empathy with emotional vulnerability.

Wednesday — Harriet Middleton Baker

**THE HARLOT'S PROGRESS**

As a reconceptualisation of William Hogarth's cautionary tale of female innocence, Harriet reorients the Harlot's progress to take place in Sci-Fi future. Interweaving video, written text and images, Harriet seeks to reposition its heroine in a positional power.

Thursday — Suzannah Pettigrew

**THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MIRAGE & REALNESS**

Collaborating with dancer Simon Donnellon, Suzannah devised 3 acts to represent the interchange and crossover of our routines, patterns and persona through digital in IRL domains. Exploring the tertiary relationships between the singular self offline/online, the third relation manifests as how we are cast and seen by others.

Friday — Lotte Anderson

**DANCE THERAPY**

MAXILLA party founder conceptualised a carefree dance workshop which sought to capture honest, uncensored, dance movement. Using video, analogue and digital lenses to re-create dance portraits, Anderson archived each instance of performance to be later published online.

Saturday — Diana Chire

**HAIR MANIFESTO**

SHE-ZINE editor and performance artist immersed her audience in a powerful installation and performance. First by utilising her hair as a medium to communicate a deep, complex web of thoughts, insecurities and paranoia by sewing her hair into poignant comments. In conjunction with her live installation, Chire played back a recorded exchange between friends on hair and body image. Her final piece, entitled 'A body like no other' rendered Diana diminutively as a body, composed of bread articles.

Sunday - Girls In Film

**EMBRACE**

TOUCH SENSITIVE drew to a close with Nikola Vasakova of GiF presenting a series of films in cosy, sanguine surroundings. Girls in Film invited the public audience to sensually explore the female form, exclusively detached from a hyper-sexualised gaze.

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TOUCH SENSITIVE TOOK PLACE BETWEEN  
21 AND 26 MARCH AT GUEST PROJECTS.  
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