

Milani Gallery 'it', 2022

The title work for this exhibition is a black silicone rubber cast replica of a boodgeroo fence post from Bidjara country, that has been inserted through the gallery wall to penetrate through from one gallery space to another. All that is visible from the first gallery is the butt of the post. What is visible in the second gallery is a slumping mass that falls to the floor from waist height.

This work is a penetrative act. The visible artwork is after the fact. The penetration is done and the 13kg fence post poses for view; something of an inversion of Robert Mapplethorpe with that bull-whip up his ass. it, 2022. Black pigmented silicone rubber and gallery wall.

There is not much that I can add to further conversations around desire, the gaze – both theoretical and proximate – or masochism that isn't already noted and agreed.

And when I felt that there was something to learn from Mapplethorpe's photography, I had a sense that it was not solely around race and the groupings of collections of black male bodies in photographic exhibition.

I was, at different times and with different intensity of feeling, aware of Mapplethorpe's interests in desire and his own gaze and the masochism of self-exposure that he and his sitters may have experienced.

I knew that I wanted to penetrate the surface tension of a gallery with silicone rubber objects, and to pull the walls inwards with the slumping weight of a rubberised agricultural wire fence strung across the space.

Signs of race and cultural identification were present in material philosophies that have informed my use of black rubber objects and white plinths in previous works.

untitled spear intervention, 2022. Black pigmented silicone rubber and gallery wall.

breaking boundaries (fence), 2022. Three silicone parts and galvanised agricultural fence fittings.

My questions were not about how racist or how sexy or how outside the photographs are, or were considered as such in their times of making, but I wondered what it might mean that I were reading the 1980 Black Males presentation now with some care about the motivations of a fellow artist, rather than applying posthumous critique.

Many bodies of artworks made and historicised would not stand if made for contemporary audiences of diversity and learning today, and I feel that like a primitivist's taste for their versions of exotic, Mapplethorpe's interest might be felt retrospectively as involving explorations of and engagement with risk. In this case, this sense of risk is the point of interest to me as a Murri homo.

To encounter an exhibition catalogue of Black Males by a white cisgendered photographer could be less interesting to a critical reader of race in contemporary art, than to a reader interested to ask questions about the formation of and embodiment of queer, gay, homo and subcultural identities in white America in between the sexual revolution and the HIV AIDS catastrophes.

Where is risk and it's excitement and it's embodiment?

In one hundred and four breathes I atomised 9 grams of tenofovir and 6 grams of emtricitabine as blue illustrations - of my choice to not consume pre exposure profilaxis.

In mutuality and support, bularru woomeras fall into each other in an embrace.

In between the two sides of a folded piece of paper, emu fat is saturated - to seal in the goodness.

Without an invitation, active parts of the gallery are fenced off to visitation.

Within the Bidjara language, gender is not a binary designation and asks relational understanding - ways of being that English is trying to cover for.

D Harding
2022