

She's So Sweet

An exhibition by Barbara Doran





Front cover image, *sweet cycle, parts 1 to 4*, 2006

Image above, *an udder delight*, 2006

Foreword

Barbara Doran's body of work, "She's So Sweet" was strongly influenced by Virginia Haussegger's book, *Wonder Woman*, published in 2005. The artist largely agrees with Virginia's position of rethinking feminism's messages and particularly the mantra that, "women can have it all".

Her photographs clearly parody those multi-tasked and multi-faceted roles that women have tried to adopt simultaneously in recent decades, such as the corporate climber, bread winner, mother, housewife, prom queen and sex kitten.

Her intention behind these works is not to diminish the achievement of women and the progress they have made in the pursuit of equality between men and women, but rather to provoke further dialogue.

These images evoke questions for the viewer, such as, just what are the right social, economic and political circumstances needed to enable a woman to balance and enjoy the many roles that she now expects of herself, and more importantly just why is she trying to do it all?

Monica McMahon
Art Curator
University of Western Sydney





Sugar and Spice

According to Mother Goose, girls are “made of sugar and spice and everything nice.” An impossibly high standard to live up to, but in her self portrait series, *She’s So Sweet*, Barbara Doran and her alter egos give it a go.

Doran wears nothing but a thick covering of pink icing and fluffy marshmallow. She is literally sweet; a cupcake princess, good enough to eat, delicious and enticing. In fact, she can’t seem to resist herself, gleefully stuffing handfuls of sticky sweetness into her mouth. Is this a vaguely cannibalistic sugar craving gone out of control; the ultimate eating disorder? Or a comment on impossible standards?

Pretty in Pink

Sometimes a girl just can’t seem to win. If we fail to conform to current standards of beauty we are at best ignored, at worst ridiculed. If we crumple under pressure: follow the latest fashion trends, starve, primp and preen our way into the latest waif-er thin model of perfection, if we are considered pretty, then ergo we must also be slutty and/or dumb. Just listen to the *Psychedelic Furs* eighties hit, or even current bad-girl diva *Pink*. Pop culture is full of examples. Blonde joke anyone?

Is Pink the New Black?

Apparently being a housewife is cool again. From the sickeningly sweet saccharine of *Desperate Housewives*, to the calculated nostalgia and financial cunning of Martha Stewart, the home is hip. At least on TV.

Doran presents the chaotic world of the superwoman syndrome. She takes on the persona of a domestic goddess who does it all. She cleans, she cooks, she goes to work; all the while making sure that her hair is done and her make-up is flawless. These could be snapshots of the early sixties, but her mobile phone points to the present. Doran seems to ask, how far have we come and what have we left behind?

The Ghosts of Feminism: 1, 2, 3

First wave feminists don't cop much flak. They got women the vote, what's not to love? Lately, second wave feminists have been accused by their own constituents of being ball-breaking, bra-burning fanatics who undermined women's traditional roles in the home and forced them to get so busy bringing home the bacon that they missed the ringing of their biological clocks. Meanwhile, a younger generation have translated the feminist quest for self determination into the firmly held belief that it's an act of empowerment to flash your tits, or to dress like a clichéd whore from an Amsterdam shop window, if you want to. Third wave feminism rides the low down, dirty wave of porn culture.

Are these the only options? Instead of the old Madonna/whore dichotomy we are offered superwoman or sex fiend. None of this seems quite right. Where do we go from here?

She's so Sweet

To her credit, Barbara Doran doesn't pretend to have all the answers. She calls her images "ponderables". As an artist, Doran aims to provoke discussion and prompt a critical analysis of how women are perceived in contemporary culture. And she reminds us that being sweet isn't easy.

Tracey Clement
2006

Tracey Clement is an artist and writer, currently living in Sydney.



Artist's Statement

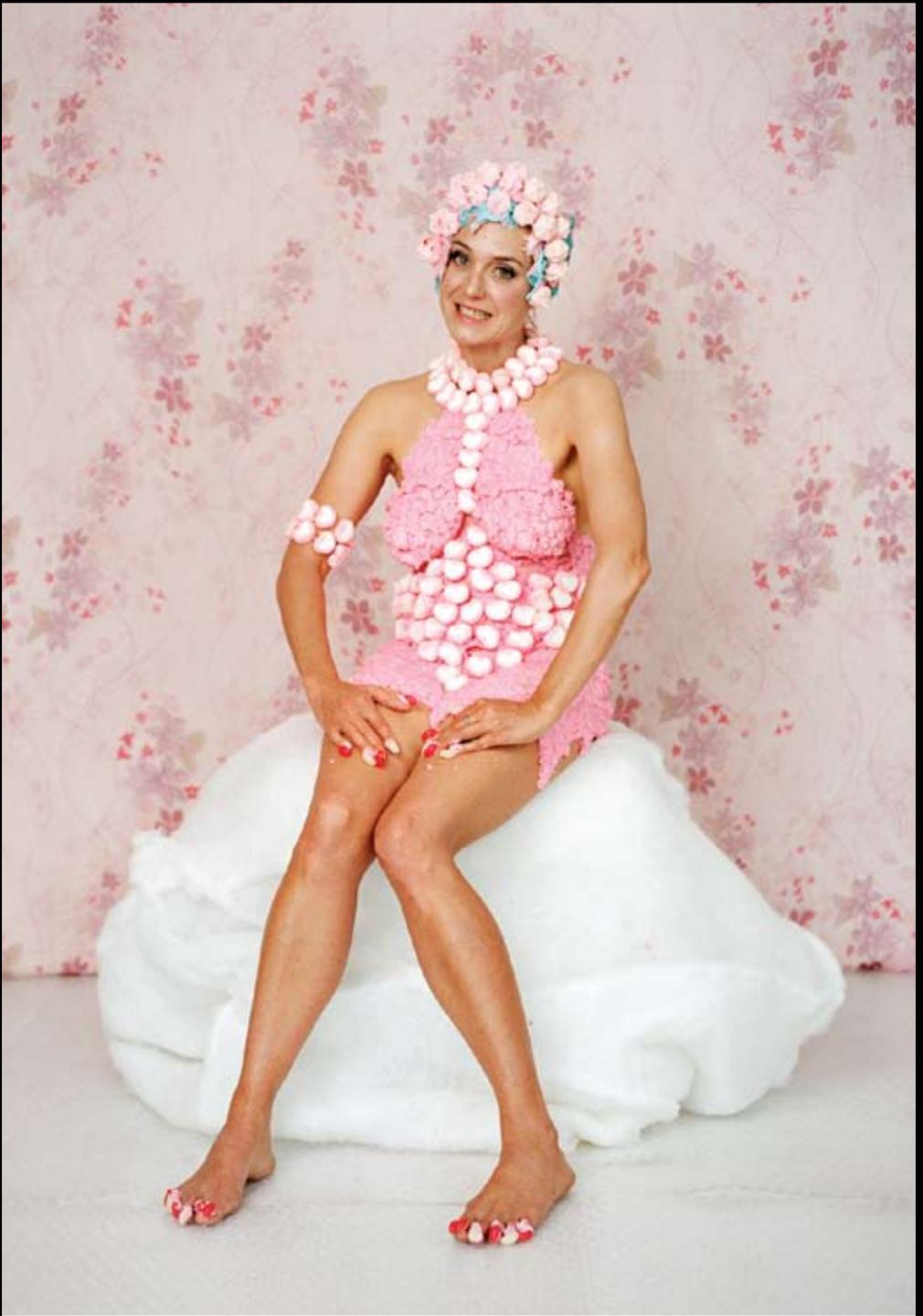
We, the daughters of second wave feminism might have it all but our lived experiences are somewhat different. In the wake of “you can have it all – go get it girl” a surly and uncomfortable silence reigns. We live amidst contradictions and failures and to bring about public debate could either be heresy or feminist suicide. We might have opportunities in the work place but that's as long as you work on masculine terms – try to take maternity leave or a half-time job to look after the kids and its “sorry your job doesn't exist anymore”.

We might have shed the vice of corsets and cumbersome social mores but our bodies are ever more domains for public charades. Skinny diets, body sculpting, tinted tresses, manicured nails, the latest cuts and colours ordained by fashion – we, yes women are the ones who buy into and sustain this stuff in schizophrenic fits of pleasure and pain, we have to ask – is this progress?

We approach our lives as strategic plans only to find that those ‘natural elements’ can't be tamed. Our wombs do not respond to the laws of mechanist physics nor do our children and there is no status to be found here. Hours of cleaning, sleep deprivation, vomit smeared clothes, regurgitated food on the floor, washing, cleaning and more cleaning and regular community performances – birthday parties – picnics. In return – no money, lowered social status and for many post-natal depression, guilt for going back to work and if you don't, guilt for not being content.

It's the loss of status that should alert us to as yet unconquered territory in the ethics and practice of equality. Our mother's generation may have fought hard for a place in the work place – for intellectual and technical credibility – for input into the hierarchies of power but not so much for the ‘value’ in the mundane, domestic domain. A civilisation needs carers, nurturers, sustainers and people to provide a supporting and connecting framework. We might find some empathy here for environmental and multicultural concerns – both occupy lower economic status in the hierarchies of money and power yet they too are concerned with valuing those parts of life that sustain us and maintain the diversity that our well being depends upon.

Barbara Doran
2006



yummy mummy, 2006



bringing home the bacon, 2006

Artist's Biography

Barbara Doran was born in 1971 in Wagga Wagga, Australia and grew up in Southern African countries Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Known for a diverse mix of skills, studies and experiences, her artwork similarly employs inter-disciplinary mediums including film, photography and sculpture. Her work probes mythology by exploring macro and micro relationships between physical and symbolic systems. Barbara's work has been exhibited in solo and group shows since 2003.

Barbara Doran's work focuses upon the shifting grounds of mythologies, their disparities, values, histories and the very 'real' realities they bare. Doran grew up in Africa where these issues were highly visible. Returning to Australia and the 'developed' world only enhanced her awareness that there are two sides to every coin.

Her art is also informed by other life experiences including world travel and studies in architecture, psychology, philosophy and anthropology. A mother of two, she has a MA in Environmental Planning and Environmental Aesthetics and is a lecturer at the University of New South Wales. She has built a rammed earth house by hand and played a co-coordinating role in community development projects and festivals. For the last seven years Doran has been working in multimedia including film, music and performance.

List of Works

Barbara Doran

an udder delight

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
120 cm x 95 cm

baker's delight

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 100 cm

bringing home the bacon

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
120 cm x 95 cm

corporate climber

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
120 cm x 95 cm

couture clutch

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 100 cm

domestic service

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 100 cm

public presence

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 100 cm

see – hands free!

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 100 cm

sweet cycle – part one

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 75 cm

sweet cycle – part two

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 75 cm

sweet cycle – part three

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 75 cm

sweet cycle – part four

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 75 cm

vardy doll

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 75 cm

wax

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 100 cm

n' polish

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
75 cm x 100 cm

yummy mummy

2006

Photograph – Lambda print
120 cm x 120 cm

Acknowledgements

She's So Sweet
UWS Art Gallery
(7 March–30 May 2008)

Special thanks is due to the artist, Barbara Doran, for facilitating the original exhibition concept and proposal.

Alex Alewood, Tracey Clement, Jeannette Mascolo and Groundfloor Gallery, who supported this exhibition.

Monica McMahon, UWS Art Curator and the exhibition project team.

This exhibition was supported by the University of Western Sydney Art Collection, Office of University Engagement.

All images were reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Publisher

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Catalogue Editor: Monica McMahon

Photography : Barbara Doran

Graphic Designer: Maureen Goh

ISBN 978-1-74108-163-3



Top image, *couture clutch*, 2006

Bottom image, *public presence*, 2006