art

anna uddenberg

—

after charles ray and matthew barney, the next step for hyperrealistic sculpture reflects cyborg culture and cyberfeminism fueled by sex, narcissism, and the technological transformation of the body and brain.
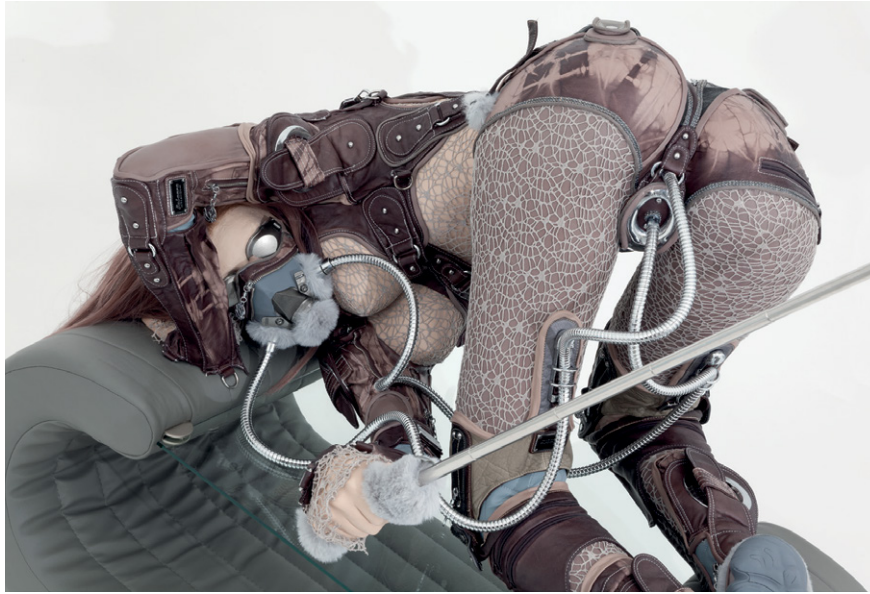
TEXT BY TAYLORE SCARABELLI

ALL ARTWORK BY ANNA UDDENBERG, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND KRAUPA-TUSKANY ZEIDLER, BERLIN

island

ANNA UDDENBERG, *RONA'S REVENGE*, 2020, PHOTO ANNE DE VRIES

TOP: ANNA UDDENBERG, *RONA'S REVENGE*, 2020,
PHOTO ANNE DE VRIES

BOTTOM: ANNA UDDENBERG, *CLIMBER (PIERCED ROSEBUD),* 2020,
PHOTO GUNTER LEPKOWSKI

Social media, once a place of discovery and refuge, has become both a utility and a social mediator, commodifying the images and perceived identities of ourselves and others. Once islands that offered an escape from daily life, these archipelagos have become filter bubbles — reinforcing narratives surrounding beauty, consumption, and normative behavior. Stranded, we lose sight of the horizon and surrounding landscape and instead look inward, replicating one another in our consumption habits and our performance of selfhood as a means to find validation online. Uddenberg's art reflects this myopia, whether by constructing humanlike forms that render bodies into cyborgs (part-smartphone, part-silicone), or through the fabrication of "furniture-esque" sculptures, made from materials that are both performatively utilitarian and accessibly luxurious — animating questions surrounding privilege, consumerism, and gender dys/euphoria as it relates to our experiences online.

In Uddenberg's *CLIMBER (Pierced Rosebud)*, 2020 (displayed online and in a recent group show put on by KTZ and others at Wilhelm Hallen), a figure cast in aqua resin and fiberglass is proportioned to perfection according to the "Instagram standard": a big ass, a small waist, and waif-like arms. The faceless body is positioned head down, as if it — or she — is attempting to climb their way up a tall, pink, microfiber-covered table (reminiscent of fast-fashion teddy coats and the exploited garment workers who create them). The sculpture is adorned in clothing that's both performatively futuristic and utilitarian: a mesh bodysuit evoking the skin of a cantaloupe, a pair of the increasingly ubiquitous Bae Crocs (the kind with a platform heel), and a pink, full-body harness that slithers up her legs, arms, and shoulders, and between the perfectly formed cheeks of her butt. Stylistically, the mannequin-like figure is fashionable, even aspirational. Yet the scene is one of submission and desperation. Pointy gray acrylic nails on top of glaringly white hands are positioned to look as if they had been scraped across the plush, synthetic fluff that covers the table, while the figure herself appears slumped over, as if she's giving up on whatever it is she was trying to do.

Uddenberg's art is mimetic: it mirrors the way "like"-hungry women pose for photos, current beauty standards, and even fashion trends (people often ask her if she plans to design her own clothes). As a result, images of Uddenberg's overdone mannequins often go viral, as if her sculptures were a less popular, synthetic version of CGI avatar Lil Miquela. In this way, her work is often interpreted as a reflection of the negative consequences of online culture, demonstrated by the fusion of face filters and fillers, fast fashion, and fashionable body types, looks, and likes — yet it's not only a simple, Judith Butler-inspired critique of gender performativity.

In the 2020 manifesto *Glitch Feminism,* curator and scholar Legacy Russell makes the case that online identities, and particularly those of Black and nonbinary people, can be mobilized as tools to "glitch" systems of oppression by making the invisible visible. "The glitch acknowledges that gendered bodies are far from absolute, but rather an imaginary, manufactured and commodified for capital," Russell writes. Uddenberg's art may not offer direct solutions to issues of agency and self-actualization, but this "glitch" can be found in her portrayal of gendered consumerism as both a celebration of the subversively hyperfeminine and a glaring critique of the hypervisibility of the white, often wealthy, female bodies favored by social media algorithms.

This mechanization of gender identity through online consumer habits and performance is explicit in Uddenberg's work, both in its content (her "It" girl mannequins are often portrayed in a cyborg-like fashion: bent over, selfie sticks pointed at their inflated behinds) and in the ways in which it is circulated (she has a big Instagram following). Viewed on social media, the work looks eerie yet familiar — evoking feelings of jealousy or disdain, like an acquaintance's outrageous bikini-selfie might. This over-the-top, sexualized performance does not necessarily fall in line with Russell's manifesto, which is generally uninterested in the ways in which white, hyperfeminine bodies can expose privilege and exploitation implicit in gender performance; however, it speaks to another important consideration: in an era when online and IRL [in real-life] identity are fused, performances of gender, whether glitched or in line with the status quo, all contribute to the same patriarchal machine. Only today, it's not just the users or consumers of these performances who stand to benefit from our attention-seeking behavior, but also the platforms themselves.

We are all being exploited, regardless of how we represent ourselves online. This is not to say that Uddenberg's work should be read as a moralistic statement on our relationship to social media and media in general, but rather that it reflects the complexities of a system that enables us to celebrate both individuality and sameness. In fact, it may implore us to think about our algorithmically allotted archipelagos in a different way. If we're all stranded on an island together, perhaps it's not so bad that we all look alike.

END