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# Exploring Personal Boundaries: Sensuality/ Sexuality

Roger Lee

Clemson University, claystreet95060@hotmail.com

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EXPLORING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES:  
SENSUALITY AND SEXUALITY

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts  
Visual Arts

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by  
Roger Lee  
May 2007

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Accepted by:  
Mike Vatalaro, Committee Chair  
David Detrich  
Sydney Cross  
Todd McDonald

## ABSTRACT

This work is about my perception of the sensual form. These ceramic sculptures are meant to interact with the audience through internal thoughts and feelings without the impression of “things” that objectify the body. There is a part of my work that is manifest through the viewer as voyeur, but my intent is not to be so explicit in that manner. Contrary to this, I am attempting to deliver a tactile approach to perceive sensuality through forms that provoke sensual pleasure. It provides a counterpoint to how we might reconsider what is sensual to what is sexual by investigating our internal thoughts and emotions rather than the preconceived objects of the body.

Through an exploration of the physiological body, I have investigated the idea of vulnerability as a “bodily” experience that has continued to reveal itself innately through the use of my materials. Vulnerability also appears in my work as a condition of discomfort and anxiety when the viewer is confronted with imagery that is sexually suggestive. I am suggesting that the viewer determine their personal boundaries between sexuality and sensuality while negotiating conditioned inhibitions.



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## THE WORK

This body of work began as an exploration of sensuality through the use of sculptural materials that lends themselves to forms and imagery that are suggestive of the body. Through this exploration of the physiological body, I have investigated the idea of vulnerability as a “bodily” experience that has continued to reveal itself innately through the use of my materials. These materials communicate tension through the physical acts of exertion, penetration, precariousness, delicacy and gravity. Vulnerability appears in my work as a condition of discomfort and anxiety when confronted with imagery that is sexually suggestive. There is a part of my work that is manifest through the voyeur in me, but my intent is not to be so explicit in that manner. Contrary to this, I am attempting to deliver a tactile approach to perceive sensuality through forms that provoke sensual pleasure. I am suggesting that the viewer determine their personal boundaries between sexuality and sensuality while they negotiate their conditioned inhibitions.

Clay is a material that is receptive and impressionable to the hand. I respond to this tactile sensation, which is similar to the touch of skin on the body. The soft material lends itself to sensual forms that evoke imagery that are corporeally suggestive. These forms are visually attractive through color and texture, while their scale promotes the suggestion of intimacy. The ambiguity of these forms provokes a sense of curiosity as we are left to consider their objectivity. They are meant to interact with the audience through internal thoughts and feelings without the impressions of “things” that objectify our body.

The condition of vulnerability is a bodily experience provoked by anxiety and discomfort. Some of the materials that I use are sensitive to the physical acts of tension expressed through exertion, penetration, and gravity. The feelings of discomfort and anxiety are provoked by the precariousness of some of these objects as they imply a sense of delicacy and impermanence. The condition of vulnerability is also perceived through explicit language that my work communicates through sexually suggestive forms. My attempt is to have viewers investigate their sensibilities through the tactile sensations, visual attraction, and playful humor of my work. There is a sense of intimacy to these forms that disarms them from the potential threat of anxiety.

Some of my work invites the viewer to touch the surfaces, interacting with texture and bulbous forms that suggests a sense of body. *If Hands Could Talk* invites the viewer to caress two “egg-like” forms that are attractive through color and texture. They rest on soft, red-velvet pillows that provide a sense of comfort. They are intimate in scale being proportion to the hands. In the palms, the prickles are deceptively seductive, taking that sensuousness into tactile pleasure. What the viewer is left to determine is their own relationship to the conventions and perceptions of sensuality while considering what these forms may imply.

In my work, vulnerability is a condition of discomfort and anxiety. Through the use of explicit imagery, the issues of vulnerability come up when private issues are confronted in public spaces. *All Eyes on Me* involves multiple pieces of extruded forms precariously balancing on one end. As each piece faces the center where the viewer is intended to stand, they are at the focus of attention. At the tips of each piece, hair-like strands mimic the extruded forms, which strongly suggest pubic hair particularly because

of their position to the viewer's pelvic region. Everything about this piece is intended to provoke feelings of discomfort. The delicacy of the material is vulnerable to the object's precariousness, while the viewer is confronted by imagery that may be sexually suggestive. As much as this piece may be repulsive to viewers, there is a sense of wonder to how these forms are balancing, as they consider what these forms may imply. The intent is to attract the viewer's curiosity by questioning these ideas.

There is a degree of vulnerability in all of my work where tension is either perceived through the viewer's interpretation of bodily forms, or communicated through the implied physical acts of exertion, penetration, gravity, and the sensitivity of the materials. *Thin-Skin* involves multiple teardrop forms made of unfired clay, contained in nylon fabric. They suspend from a sharp, gaff-like hook that provokes a sense of threat. The sheerness of the nylon material is deceptively resilient as these forms are stretched, implying the sense of gravity and weight. Within the nylon structure, unfired clay is suspended and dematerialized by reconstituting the forms with water. The objects deconstruct but hold together through the resilience of the nylon that operates like the skin on the body.

In the late 1970's series *R.S.V.P.*, Senga Nengudi explores fragility, sensuality, and the visceral through her corporeally suggestive forms. These were pendulous sacs, made from used pantyhose filled with sand, mud and other malleable materials. They were stretched and manipulated, distorting the volume and tension on the surface. The resilience of the material is suggestive of human flesh offering us sensuous forms saturated with a sense of body. The sheerness of the flesh-tone nylon creates the illusion of vulnerability as the weight of these sacs may potentially tear the delicate surfaces.

Senga Nengudi explores aspects of the human body in relation to spirituality, ritual, and philosophy. She negotiates balance between the visceral and the physical in the context of vulnerability.

Charles Long's *Amorphous Body Study Center* invites the viewer to sit and relax while experiencing the sensuousness of these bodily forms. The audience is literally connected through a set of earphones, as they listen to melodic tunes by British pop-group *Stereolab*. Long negotiates the detachment of our innate senses in a culture consumed with technology and information where sensibilities are programmed and less inherent. He attempts to reconnect the audience with their inherent sensibilities by provoking tactile, visual and auditory sensations. These amorphous forms explore the sensuousness of the corporeal body while viewers investigate the sensations of their own bodily experience.

During the Neo-Concrete movement in Brazil (1959-1961), Lygia Clark was interested in the immediate experience of bodily sensations. Her *Six Sensorial Masks* were intended to interact with the audience by experiencing a variety of visual, olfactory, and auditory sensations. The work was about the experience of that very moment, leaving all residual life out of context. The viewer became a part of the work through their interaction with the material. Their experiences created the phenomenon of bodily sensations.

Also inspired by the Neo-Concrete movement, Ernesto Neto's work is an exploration of bodily experiences that invite the viewer to participate in a landscape of sensual forms. These are made of nylon and cotton materials stuffed to create a malleable

surface. The intimacy with his work provides a sense of body as viewers physically interact with the surfaces that fill the entire viewing space.

Artists that have worked within this idea of body have often expressed their concerns for the vulnerable to reconnect our self with our human psyche. In my work, I have attempted to engage the audience in responding to their bodily sensations through forms that are corporeally suggestive. My intent is to provoke an internal response from the viewer through sensations that evoke pleasure through sensual forms and anxiety through vulnerable conditions.

Through my exploration of sensual forms, I have investigated the idea of sensuality through my materials, forms, and the sense of body. Within this exploration, I have also investigated the condition of vulnerability in my materials and the conditions of discomfort and anxiety. As my work tends to address issues between sexuality and sensuality, the viewer must negotiate their own inhibitions. What I hope to accomplish through this work is to engage the viewer to experience these bodily sensations while considering their own perception of sensuality. This work is about my perception of the sensual form. It provides a counterpoint to how we might reconsider what is sensual and what is sexual by investigating our internal thoughts and emotions rather than preconceive objects of the body.



## APPENDIX

### Clay Body Formula

#### Cone 10 White Stoneware Clay

Hawthorn Bond Fire Clay	25 lbs.
Goldart Clay	25 lbs.
Tennessee Ball Clay	15 lbs.
#6 Tile Clay	15 lbs.
Flint	8 lbs.
F-4 Feldspar	12 lbs.
Plastic Vitrox	1 lb.
Pyrophyllite	5 lbs.
Fine Grog	5-10 lbs.

Used for thrown, extruded, and slab-constructed forms

### Glaze Recipes Cone 6 Soda

#### Virginia Scotchie's Cone 6 Bronze

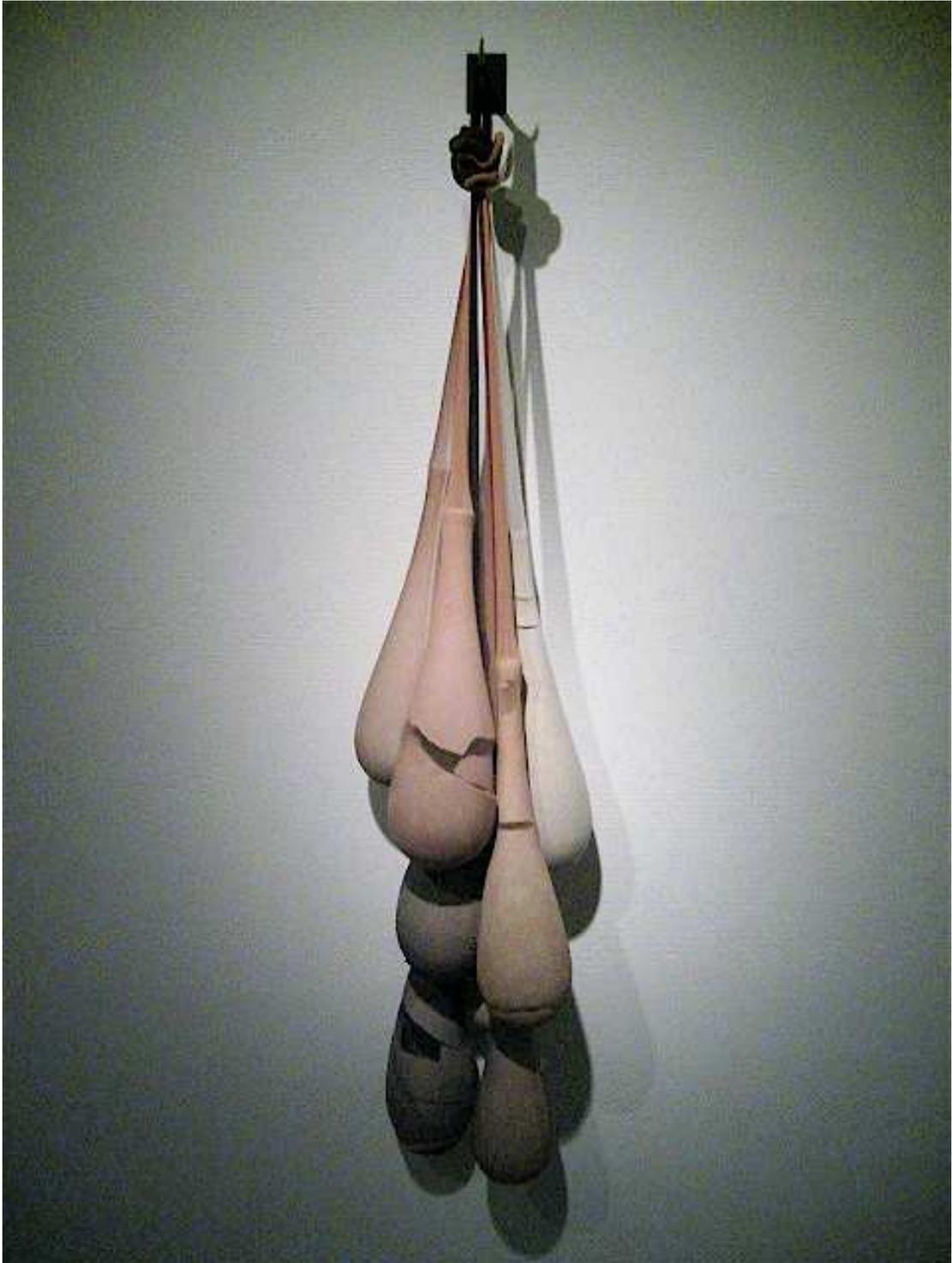
Red Art	60
Gerstley Borate	30
Ball Clay	5
Silica	5
Add: Manganese	45
Copper Carbonate	5
Cobalt Oxide	5

#### Cone 6 Hamada's Turquoise

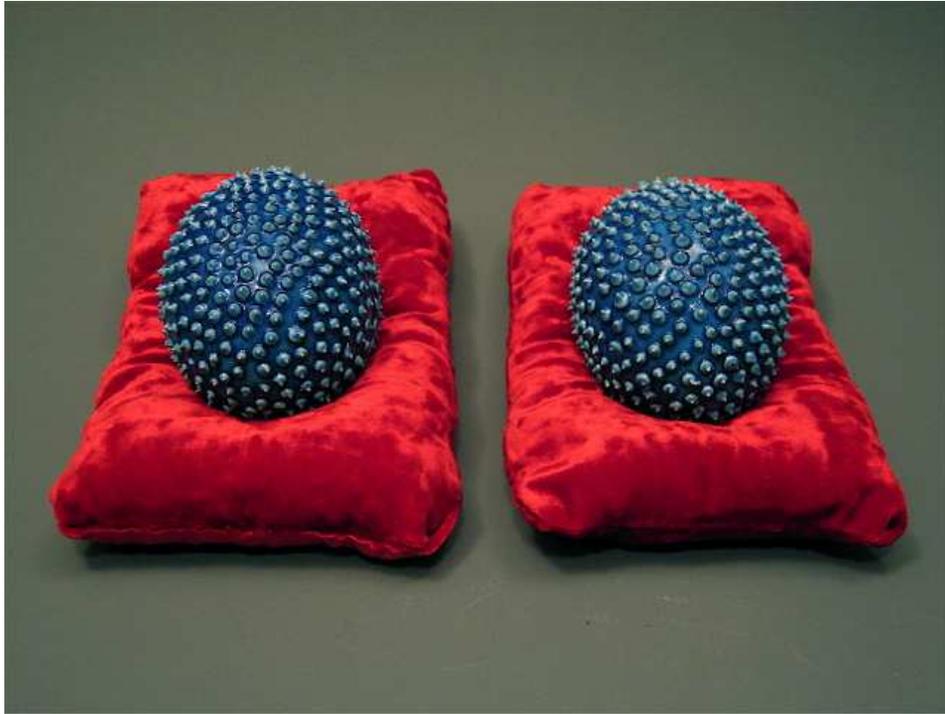
Nepheline Syenite	40
Barium Carbonate	23
(substitute Strontium)	17.2
Whiting	10
Frit 3110	10
Zinc Oxide	9
EPK	2
Add: Copper Carbonate	3
Bentonite	



SLIDES



“Thin-Skin”



“If Hands Could Talk”



“Who Wants Some?”



“Penetration Sensation”



“Gravitation Sensation”



"Guilty Pleasures"



"All Eyes on Me"



“Tittillation Sensation”



“Conflicting Desires”



“Spread ‘em”

