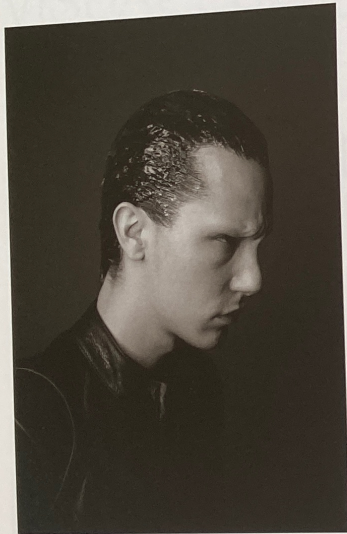


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Miss Cox II, 2019, 106 x 95 x 116 cm

Multifaceted is a term often used within the *Glamcult* universe. A notion that encapsulates the DIY attitudes of artists coming into their own, and finding their creative Homes. This constant quest for the creative sublime — an experience that “takes us beyond ourselves” — is an aesthetic high, and one that MARIKEN WESSELS ignites. The moment I first caught eyes on her photography book *Miss Cox*, presented at Amsterdam’s Athenaeum Bookstore I needed to know more. In talking with the artist, I quickly learnt Wessels to be someone who has walked this disciplinary path; from DIY to finding her field, where exploration has led her to her haven: Photography, Filmmaking and Sculpture.

MARIKEN WESSELS

Words by Grace Powell



Sculpture of the Underarm, 2020



Solo, March 17, 2019

Graduating from the AMSTERDAM THEATRE SCHOOL for acting in 1989, Wessels first began her journey on stage. "As an actor, one learns to delve deep into human psychology and question which emotions lead to certain behaviors," she reflects. "During this time, I always chose to write scenarios and then research," providing the catalyst for the introspective work she has gone on to produce. Acting as an educational stepping-stone to the art she conducts today, Wessels acknowledges this affinity, "what I learned in those years is still valuable for my artistic projects today ... the deeper I get involved in the story, the more I sense the need to perform research." This research-focused optic, led Wessels to a discovery of character, intention, and the personality behind her recent works, including my initial meet-cute, *Miss Cox*. This narrative formation, including an awareness of internal consciousness, is integral for Wessels, as it is "in research that I discover the personality behind a character, questioning their intentions. My answers to such questions form the background to my work."

Later broadening her skill set, Wessels transitioned into Fine Arts, going on to study in 2004 at GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE. Since then, her work has

recently been exhibited at FOTOMUSEUM ANTWERP and FOTOMUSEUM DEN HAAG, and is currently stationed at the *Contemporary Art Department* at MUSEUM PRINCESSEHOF in Leeuwarden. Today, having produced a large body of work, from her 2005 film *Luicht* to more recent pieces such as the 2019 series *Nude—Arising from the Ground*, her artistry lies within conceptualising the human body, in particular the dyadic female form. Her aforementioned piece, *Miss Cox*, is a project made from these respective dimensions, consisting of "sculpture, photography, installation, a looped film and a book," she clarifies the series' scope. "It all began with my fascination for a photo sequence by EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE, from his famous *Human and Animal Locomotion* series." Starting with the nineteenth-century visual pioneer, this piece similarly highlights objects in motions, reducing external perception and emphasising anatomic reality. "In this 24-image sequence, called *Arising from the Ground* (plate 286), a rather obese woman can be seen, whose name supposedly was Miss Cox." When capturing the body, she highlights that "this appearance of an immense woman with her heavy breasts becomes almost a landscape." And by using the anonymous figure, "there was no psychology involved," just the outward eye.



Nude—Upside Down and Back Again IV, 2019

However, in a world where the debate around womanhood and the relationship to our bodies is so bountiful, it is oddly refreshing to have the politicisation removed. As an object detached from social subjection, this is a novel reality for obese bodies. "A woman's relationship to her body did not play any role in this project. The life-size ceramic sculptures are first about the struggle for a heavy body to move from a lying position to a fully upright position. So, it is about the slow movements of a heavy body mass. By having a model jump into the water and move whilst submerged became the subject of the photo series and the film work." The relation to space is key in observing the object itself within this world. She continues, "An obese body underwater becomes almost weightless and behaves completely different compared to above ground. Alongside this, the texture of the skin and the shapes that the body assumes lead to alienating landscapes. I was interested to explore and capture this through photography." And staying true to her original inspiration, Wessels adds that "the body becomes almost animalistic underwater."

Despite her clear intentions in creation, Wessels' take is a strikingly Duchampesque stance, knowing the active role of the audience within the production of art. "The viewer

is free to interpret the work as they wish" she clarifies. "My work is apolitical, and I don't feel tempted to take standpoints considering societal or political issues or to state something specific about obesity." However, though intentionally unpolitical, in releasing them into today's cultural context Wessels acknowledges that "I don't see a body that does not fit or that we perceive as being incorrect," and with this irrevocable reality the face is removed. "It feels right to leave out the head, which I feel supports my focus on the body and not on the body politic itself."

Though seasoned in a multitude of artistic disciplines, finding a work's innate creative medium is a process in which Wessels takes great care—a significant element of any project she explains as she walks us through her process. "Usually, I work on long-term projects. It starts with a concept or a framework. During my research and work process there arise multiple side avenues, for each of which I determine which medium suits best its materialisation." This practice of listening to the work and moulding it into its self-chosen form is what Wessels accounts to "intuition," pointing out that by doing so, "the outcome is a project which forms itself in a variety of intersecting mediums." This not only depends on the piece, but also the place in



Suspicion of the Unknown, 2020

Under and Above, 2020



which her work will find its home. “Depending on the exhibition venue and purpose I can build different constellations and emphasise one avenue (or medium) over another. My work results in, or becomes a combination of, artist’s books, films, photo series, lightboxes, and (ceramic) sculptures.” It is this freedom that excels each piece’s attributes against its contextual surroundings.

The environment for Wessels never goes unnoticed, as it “is part of the work, like plants and the properties of water and light.” She describes this notion to me, and how it actualises within her work, “The body figures are in a habitat while the sculptures from *Arising from the Ground* operate in isolation. In the lightbox installation *Snapshots of the Unknown*, for example, a variety of images related to one another by virtue of composition, so collage-like images arise within the complexity of the entire project.” Overall, each piece has a unique property that all begins as a “tiny spark” within a space, which then grows into a “moment on fire,” once set free into the world.

We end our conversation, in many ways, back to where we began: Home. But on a personal level, its definition is family-orientated as “home means the place where I live with my family,” however “home is also my studio; a place

where I can be found every day.” As multifaceted as her work, the concept of Home too has a multitude of connotations—and amid an expanding sense of freedom, I could not agree more.

Last Effort, 2019, 130 x 38 x 65 cm



MARIKEN WESSELS