

Since her first seminal piece, 'Disclosures: A Photographic Construct', 1982, Julie Rrap has sought to 'disclose' the human body, and unravel the ways in which it has been represented throughout key phases in the history of art and perception. For the most part, Rrap has used her own body in photographs, videos and sculptures. This is a performing body – not in the sense that the artist documents performances per se - rather, it is a body that enacts various postures.

Rrap's representation of the body is never comfortable, for it is a figure that has often been dissected into parts, distorted, and at times squeezed into the stance of the artist's muse. Even when Rrap uses the male form, it has been 'rapped' (sic), as it were, around a rock or landscape formation. Rrap's works go to the heart of the photographic paradigm - they deliberately occupy an ambivalent zone between documentation and invention. The 'performance' is a continual shuttling between the reality of the exposed body, and the trickery offered by the photographic apparatus and its more recent digital permutations.

For Julie Rrap, photography has always been an art of both the observer and the observed. One cannot shoot an image innocently. To shoot a camera, and to take aim is, in a sense, to both capture and target the subject. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore, that her latest series, 'Soft Targets', takes titles from specialist firearm terminology. For just as the body is dissected by the camera, so too the firearm aims to splinter the body. Just as the act of photography is performative, so too the act of shooting a gun. The comparisons highlight the ethics at stake in photography – what does it mean to 'shoot' an image – particularly in the context of the professional and amateur war photography that has emerged from Iraq.

'Soft Targets' are sumptuous life-size works on watercolour paper. The body has been photographed with a stark white light, accentuating it as flesh. The artist's face is averted, underscoring the significance of the body as target. Careful observation of the images reveal that while the shadows of limbs remain, the corresponding body parts have been erased. These shadows are like phantom limbs. In 'Fishtailing', the shadow becomes a mirror: the artist's face is captured at the tip of the reflection, as if the figure is about to dive into a pool of water. But the shadow does not in itself mirror the body, and one of the arms has been removed – or has it? The shadow takes on the fullsome properties of the body, while in images like 'Hangfire', the body itself is reduced to an almost emaciated state.

The relationship with the technical titles of these works is not illustrative; rather the association is often humorous. While the term 'cheekpiece' refers to that part of the gun that rests against the facial cheek, Rrap's camera accentuates her own anterior 'cheeks'. And while 'Pump' refers to a moveable 'forearm' device on the gun, the image depicts the artist in the pose of a push-up. Humour does not, however, belie the serious nature of these photographs. The spontaneity of the

poses, their almost dance-like quality, transform the entire body into a gesture – the artist’s gesture. Once again, the image shuttles between documentation and artifice, reflecting upon the dance we all do between the ethics and aesthetics of ‘representation’.

Author: Victoria Lynn

Title: Soft Targets: Julie Rrap

Date: 2005

Publication: Arc One Gallery Catalogue for exhibition *Julie Rrap:Soft Targets*
2005