

rope (2006), he coiled 16 kilometres (10 miles) of razor wire into a small circle. The most potent of this series is *Soccer Ball* (2009), a to-scale sculptural object crafted out of razor wire; the latent sense of play inherent in the ball is masked by the razor's edge, symbolizing the false sense of an economically and politically level playing field of then-approaching 2010 World Cup of soccer in South Africa. Notwithstanding the metallic charm of the works in this series, Abdessemed presents a new addition that is not only physically dangerous but also politically incendiary. A compelling reference to Christ's crown of thorns, the artist's hats of thorns bear a strange affinity with the standard cowboy hat, and thus, to one of the proverbial symbols of Americana. *Hats* may point to the use of razor wire as a physical impediment to human beings (a borderline). It also serves as a toxic symbol of anti-immigration laws, racism and injustice, which makes me immediately think of Arizona Senate Bill 1070 (a.k.a., the *Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act*), a piece of legislature that requires non-residents to carry documentation of their registration in the state at all times; in other words, a tragic example of racial profiling and a breakdown of constitutional rights and civil liberties. Another reading of the work suggests it signifies the lacerating transgressions of American foreign policy, profiteering and war-mongering. For Abdessemed, the hat may be more than a cultural symbol of Americana, it may actually be an effigy of US imperialism. And it seemed like a perfect coincidence when, just a day after the exhibition's opening, WikiLeaks began releasing to international public scrutiny some 251,287 confidential diplomatic cables sent by U.S. embassies.

Finally, Abdessemed's exhibition takes its name from a looped 46-second video projection called *The Future of Décor* (2010). The piece was commissioned by Onsite at OCAD, and this showing was its world premiere. Here, the artist's long-time collaborator and friend David Moss is dressed in a white shirt, with devil horns on his head, and he sings with rancorous force—somewhere between a deafening howl and a burning shriek—the word “dégorr!” for almost the entire length of the video. While expelling most of the air from his lungs for this provocative gesture, Moss comes close to the point of suffocation—or, better yet, auto-asphyxiation. Funnily enough, his pitch is so noxious and penetrating that attendants turn off the work as soon as visitors exit the gallery. Standing in the narrow



space opposite the projection of Moss and his “song” is like standing in a wind tunnel with your eyes open—it is an experience that must be felt in order to be grasped. During his OCAD University lecture, Abdessemed suggested that “the devil was not the devil [as we know it], he was a fabulous entity” who was loosely based on the figure of Bacchus (after Dionysus) and only became “the devil” since Christ's death. Thus, this piece embodies the artist's infamous “à l'attaque” aesthetic strategy while continuing his incendiary criticism of monotheistic

religions like Christianity. *The Future of Décor*—both the work itself and the exhibition—characterizes Abdessemed's rousing political philosophy and infatuation with visualizing aggression. The pitch and vigour that his work so powerfully enacts signifies the possible futures and consequences of transgressive visual media within the cultural fold.

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## CHRIS CURRERI: SOMETHING SOMETHING

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO ART CENTRE, TORONTO  
APRIL 30 – 31 MAY, 2011  
BY ANNIE MACDONELL

Chris Curreri has made 16mm films, sculptures and installations, but in the last few years, his main output has been large, carefully executed, decidedly photographic images. Generally, they are produced in small suites of three to five pieces or, occasionally, as single images. His subject matter is as consistent as his means. Since 2008, his images have depicted variations on the theme of the body and its relationship to the world. *Something Something*, curated by Vanessa Fleet and Kristin Stoesz at the UTAC Art Lounge, gives viewers the most thorough overview of Curreri's work to date. Seeing the five photographic series together allows for a better understanding of the vocabulary Curreri has been developing over the last years.

All the photographs in the show depict the male figure, which, when it is portrayed in full, is nude or very nearly so. Curreri photographs his subjects straight on, in deceptively simple scenarios that put the body to use in a number of ways. Occasionally, the whole figure is traded in for a singular hand, shot close up and printed five or six feet high. Both the hands and the bodies interact and intersect with vases, with PVC tubing, and with malleable wads of chewing gum in a range of contortions that read as awkward, erotic and ecstatic by turn.

The series *Puppet*, shot in 2008, represents the earliest work in the show. Over the course of its five images, Curreri charts a range of variations on the interplay of two forms. A young man's

† Adel Abdessemed, *Hat*, 2010,  
Razor Wire  
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER,  
NEW YORK



body, pale against a backdrop of dark walls and scuffed floorboards, slumps and poses around an oversized ceramic vase. The figure is both strong and malleable, and there is a simple pleasure in watching it produce variations on its own hard angles and gentle curves. But the main intrigue of the series is the constantly shifting relationship between the body and its counterpart in the rigid vase. The model contorts around the form in poses that seem to be mimicking it, worshipping it, defaming it, cradling it, fucking it. In fact, each image contains some component of all these interactions, and it is the simultaneity of possibilities that makes the series work. *Puppet* is the record of an unusual copulation between two things. The result of this strange ritual is not a third entity but the perpetual mutation of the original forms within the mind of the viewer.

The interplay between human figure and non-human object is revisited in the two single six-foot images that punctuate the show. The first is a black and white untitled work from 2010, which shows the fingers of a giant hand caught up in the skin of a deflated chewing gum bubble. The second is from the series *Handle* (2009), which shows a fist holding aloft a vase of red transparent glass. The fingers close firmly around the neck of the vase, which extends straight down before widening out into a bulbous base. The vase is partly the inverted twin of the hand itself, but the way the hand grasps it also transforms it into a cartoon phallus or a shiny glass sex toy, one with the double potential to fuck and be fucked. It is both phallus and orifice, and the hand is brandishing it like a weapon and cradling it like a lover all at once.

† Chris Curreri, *Model in the Sculptor's Studio*, detail, 2010, c-print, 55cm x 40cm  
PHOTO © CHRIS CURRERI

In the most recent work in the show, a triptych titled *Model in the Sculptor's Studio* (2010), the vase has been replaced by a piece of black PVC tubing. The human figure is presented this time against the romantic disarray of a sculpture studio. The light is soft, directional, and warm enough to suggest a sun setting somewhere nearby. In this classical scenario, the naked body becomes the nude proper. A familiar kind of beauty is at play and it is hard not to be drawn in by it. The only thing stopping us is the piece of cheap, unlovely PVC tubing, which reappears in two images and then disappears uncannily in the third.

In the central image of the triptych, the model is bent at the hip, folded over the PVC tube, which is wedged tight into the place where the body hinges. His hands grasp at the base of the wooden dolly on which he stands, betraying the effort of the contortion. Forced between his chest and his thigh, the tube becomes a lens or a peephole that pierces the body, allowing us to see through to the space behind. In a second image, the model is crouched low on the platform, body folded around an arm that is punched through the same black tube. In the last image, the model's back is flat to the camera. He is slumped in such a way that his arms, legs and head are invisible. The pose turns the body into an odd mass of flesh, cleaved only by the line of the spine and the ass. If the first two images depict a body that is trying to ingest or merge in some way with the plastic ocular device, then the third provides us with the result of this merger. The body has become the short, squat equivalent of the tube, which is otherwise absent from the image. The romance of the setting and the lighting remain, but the classical body has been swapped for a truncated, hybrid thing that is unsettling in its formlessness.

The third suite of photographs, titled *The Thing* (2011), puts the body to



† Chris Curreri, *Puppet*, 2008  
c-print, 24cm x 30cm  
PHOTO © CHRIS CURRERI

different usage. Produced in collaboration with Luis Jacob, the images show a figure outfitted in an iridescent pink Zentai bodysuit. Photographed in a bedroom, the sheathed figure bucks and writhes on a bare mattress. There is a spontaneity to these images that is not present in any others in the show. The body is performing rather than posing, and as it contorts against the shiny fabric, the blinding white highlights exaggerate its outward push. Each gesture reads as a revolt of sorts—the thing within rising up and kicking at its enclosure, suggesting perhaps that the real struggle is not with the forms and figures in the outside world, but rather with the thin membrane that divides us so effectively from experiencing that world unfiltered.

One of the significant aspects of Curreri's imagery is the precision of its visual vocabulary. No element within the photographic frame is casual or accidental. Every detail and formal choice is put to specific use in his ongoing project of constructing meaning from the interplay of bodies, objects and the medium of photography itself. The exhibition *Something Something* displays the vivid and complicated results of a sustained engagement with a single subject. Each photograph depicts the intersection of the human figure with something that is distinctly other. The result is a fundamental shift in our understanding of things (be they human or otherwise) in a world that, through Curreri's lens, has become deeply and satisfyingly queer.

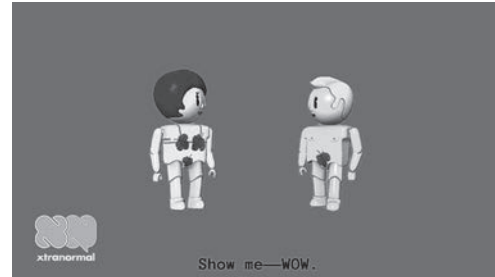
*Annie MacDonell is a multi-disciplinary artist who lives in Toronto.*

## FRANCES STARK: I'VE HAD IT AND A HALF

THE HAMMER MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

APRIL 17, 2011

BY JENIFER PAPARARO



*I've Had it and a Half* is a Frances Stark performance in halves, one divided into parts and parts of parts, portioned up, segmented as if there could never be a whole. As if the pieces didn't have a unifying title, a beginning and an end, or even a sequential progression. It was made of parts and staged as a series of vignettes that seemed unsystematically ordered as if Stark had randomly pulled them from her hat, which she did at one interval.

There were no formal introductions, but as the lights dimmed and the hip-hop soundtrack receded, a six-piece string ensemble, which sat divided onstage, performed a *divertimento* by Haydn as simple lines of text appeared on an otherwise blank screen behind them. The music seemed metrically paced to the text, flowing in short, legible fragments. One section read, "Do you not agree that the reader is able to assimilate only one part at a time? Sometimes he reads two or three passages and never returns; and not mark you because he is not interested, but because of some totally extraneous circumstance; and even if he reads the whole thing, do you suppose for one moment that he has a view of it as a whole, appreciates the constructive harmony of the parts?"

By inaugurating the performance with these words, Stark acknowledged the audience's presence, predicting plausible distractions and slips in our attention, almost guaranteeing them. She seemed to be identifying a symptom of reading, defining a characteristic of the way we read or ingest information. It was comforting, as if our host was congenially relieving us of some sort of responsibility. It also seemed a generous acknowledgement with sincere intent to question her role as presenter and author, and ours as viewers and readers—and, as such, animating our respective positions and generating an uneasy awareness that we were as much characters in this performance as she was.

The opening text is a quotation from Witold Gombrowicz, not the first time Stark has referenced the Polish writer or this passage in particular. By quoting him, she quoted herself, appropriating his words as she referenced her own work. Similar to Gombrowicz, who stated, "I am writing about myself—I have no right to write about anything else," Stark became her own subject. As part of *I've Had it and a Half*, Stark screened video documentation of an earlier performance gutted of any actual words to leave only her verbal tics, and the pauses, the "ums" and

↑ Frances Stark, *First Meeting from I've Had It and a Half* Performance at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles April 17, 2011