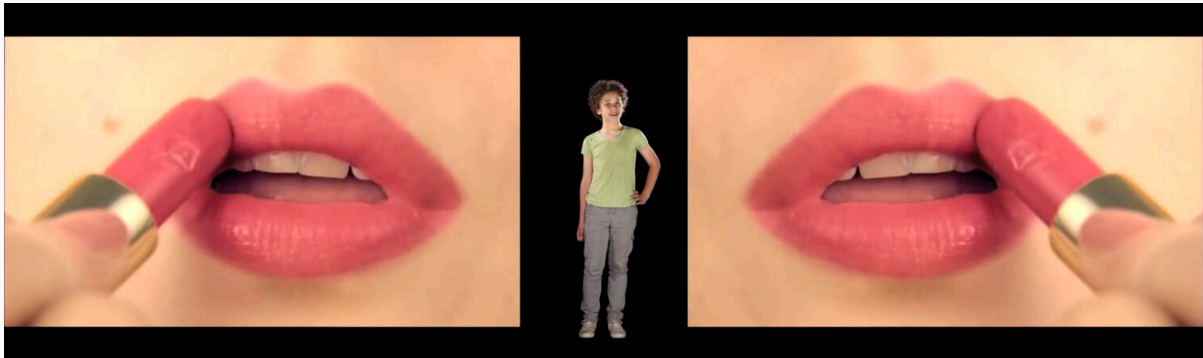


## MATT MORRIS

### Lipstick Effects

by Matt Morris



Candice Breitz. *TLDR*, 20173-channel video, 1 hour

TLDR (the acronym for "too long, didn't read") was made in close dialogue with a community of sex workers based in Cape Town, South Africa. The installation explores the cultural debates surrounding sex work, and the ongoing campaign for human rights for those who make a living in the sex industry. <https://artbma.org/exhibitions/digital/breitz/tldr.html>

Since just after 2000, economists and beauty industry commentators have bandied around the concept of "the lipstick effect" to refer to consumers' willingness to invest in small luxury items during periods of economic downturn. For instance, during recessions or depressions or war time, sports cars and fur coats and big ticket artwork sales will plummet, but upgrading to a more expensive brand of lipstick as a private indulgence is a documented trend that corresponds to social and economic upheaval.



Phyllis Bramson. *Lure*, 1996  
Mixed media on canvas, 76" × 84"

I don't wear lipstick very often, but I do wear perfumes that smell like lipstick. The simulacra of this tickles the right part of my brain, I guess. I wrote extensively on this genre of fragrance last year for *Fragrantica*: <https://www.fragrantica.com/news/Who-Is-the-Creamiest-the-Waxiest-the-Most-Lipsticky-of-Them-All--12550.html>



Vaginal Davis. *Marge and Gower Champion*, 2018

Etched mirror, edition of 20

<https://adamsandollman.com/Vaginal-Davis-An-invitation-to-the-Dance>

In my shelter at home confinement, I've revisited books of beauty tips from burlesque star Dita Von Teese—I like that she distinguishes between beauty and glamour, and emphasizes the celebration of eccentricity in the self one cultivates. Every day I've peered into an etched mirror artwork by Vaginal Davis that is part of our collection—Vaginal may be the most glamorous artist I can think of, while also being one of the most outrageous and much more influential to the culture than she is credited. I've been painting plastic suncatchers with my partner using shades of nail polishes we've shoplifted. I've been going back through all of the stunning projects Rihanna has done in the past few years under the Fenty brand—there are way more

lingerie collections and fashion runways and makeup shades than I have been able to keep track of.



Karinne Smith. *Pinkies*, 2020 Collagen, pink soda, fruit punch, blue satin, vanilla fondant, earrings, pins, latex, baby powder, acrylic, melon and bubblegum candy, oil, hair, lashes, hair ties, butterfly clips, melon, Sugar Cookie carpet, mylar, dryer helmet, butterflies, strawberries  
<https://iamksmith.com>

As with the institution where I teach, MFA programs worldwide have had to reconceive how a thesis exhibition might be presented during COVID, and most have devised some online gallery solution, flooding my email box with virtual exhibitions that crowd in for attention alongside the virtual art fairs, virtual programming, virtual benevolence of powerhouse programs like Zwirner and Gagosian who have made big shows of sharing their platforms with fledgling commercial projects. I've never felt more introverted than I do now, but I'm happy to know about the practice of Karinne Smith whose MFA work has appeared in my Instagram feed. *Pinkies* reminds me of my favorite parts of Rina Banerjee and Karla Black, while carrying some of the gravitas and heft that I love in the aforementioned practice of Ms. Davis and also in some of the connotated readymade works of Diamond Stingily. In Smith's installation, a kind of holding environment is ethereally erected, and embedded with cosmetics, candy, soda, and swishy textiles. This is a rococo gone awry confabulation, the semiotics of which point toward beauty and bodies, indulgence and idle destruction.



Howardena Pindell. Untitled #20 (Dutch Wives Circled and Squared), 1978.

Mixed media on canvas; 86 × 110 in. (218.4 × 279.4 cm).

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Albert A. Robin by exchange, 2014.15.

<https://mcachicago.org/Collection/Items/1978/Howardena-Pindell-Untitled-20-Dutch-Wives-Circled-And-1978>

I have been listening to all of Cocteau Twins.

I've also been listening to film scores written for Douglas Sirk pictures, operettas, and a blithe little album of mood music Dita Von Teese made with Sébastien Tellier in '18.



Lynda Benglis. *Untitled*, 1972

Beeswax, damar resin and pigment on wood

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/benglis-untitled-l03803>

Doreen Garner. *Pearl Necklace with Meat Sack*, 2015

Glass, Swarovski crystals, pearls, cabochons, urethane plastic, epoxy putty, hair weave, urethane rubber, wood stain, condoms, tampons, metallic wrapping paper, Q-tips, glitter, iridescent pigment, beads, steel chain, nail bed, acrylic dentures, baking bundts 65 x 18 x 18 inches

<http://www.doreengarner.com/abjection/11bzb1h1ne7g5jhxg8ce6gqou86u64>

I've started following the Dallas, Texas-based bespoke lipstick boutique MYXBlendBar on Instagram to watch their engrossing supercuts of blending pigments and producing tubes of lip color that are like equal parts of that episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* where he shares how Crayola crayons are made, my favorite footage of a painter painting, Elizabeth Murray's segment in one of the first seasons of Art21, and a peculiar subculture of ASMR videos I've found on Youtube in which people eat candy that's been shaped like tubes of lipstick.

I'm trying to show you that lipstick is not only a fashion accessory but also an economic indicator, which means it's a pocket sized rocket that is not only overtly gendered, but

embedded into its pliant, pink-mauve flesh are also persistent histories of class struggle, racialization, and, ultimately, power. This keeps with a line of thought I bring up with my analyst often: my conviction that the deepest meanings reside in the most apparent frippery. Or, as I said in an interview with Jared Ledesma earlier this year, “My work deals in inconvenient reminders. I approach surface and depth as having collapsed into one another. The cosmetic is the most psychoanalytic. A ribbon carries on its back all of the misogyny and all of the frivolity.”



Amanda Williams. *Pink Oil Moisturizer (Winter; Overall)*, 2014  
Color(ed) Theory Series

From Williams: “Trusted friends and family joined me in covertly painting soon to be demolished, empty houses in and around Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood. I’d developed a culturally coded, monochromatic color palette based on hues that are primarily found in consumer products that are marketed toward Black people. These colors dominate south side commercial corridors. The project questioned how colors possess socially constructed meanings and associations that are inextricably linked to the politics of race and class in America. The palette combined my academic/formal understanding of color theory with my lived sensibility of growing up as a colored girl on the South Side. Racism is my city’s vivid hue.”

Out of curiosity, I decided to participate in the “lipstick effect” with intent, and ordered several shades of Maybelline SuperStay Matte Ink Liquid Lipstick, and several tubes of MAC classic matte lipstick. The former have arrived, while the latter are suspended in an uncertain transit

path. Opening the packaging for these lip colors felt very similar to opening boxes of soft pastels I've been ordering to make drawings of a 1929 cover of *Le Sourire* magazine that features a pinup model outfitted as a powder puff and compact. Incidentally, while *Le Sourire* had changed ownership several times by the late 20s, in its earliest inception, it was produced by the painter Paul Gauguin who's one of the Modernists that I just cannot with. But I'm thinking a lot about the Impressionists lately—Ross King's book *Mad Enchantment* concerning the last two decades of Monet's life stoked my interest in the ways soft image making was entangled in the emergent capitalism and politics of the day; just before quarantine, the Art Institute of Chicago had hung a room as a tidy little exhibition called *The Impressionist Pastel*, which included a drop dead gorgeous pastel on canvas, *The Milliner*, c. 1877, by Eva Gonzalès. And my research projects into the life and work of American painter Florine Stettheimer, 1871–1944, seem to be recently expanding to also include Marie Laurencin, French 1883–1956, as queer icons however obfuscated the particulars of their sexual orientations have been made by history.



Eva Gonzalès. *The Milliner*, c. 1877

Pastel on canvas

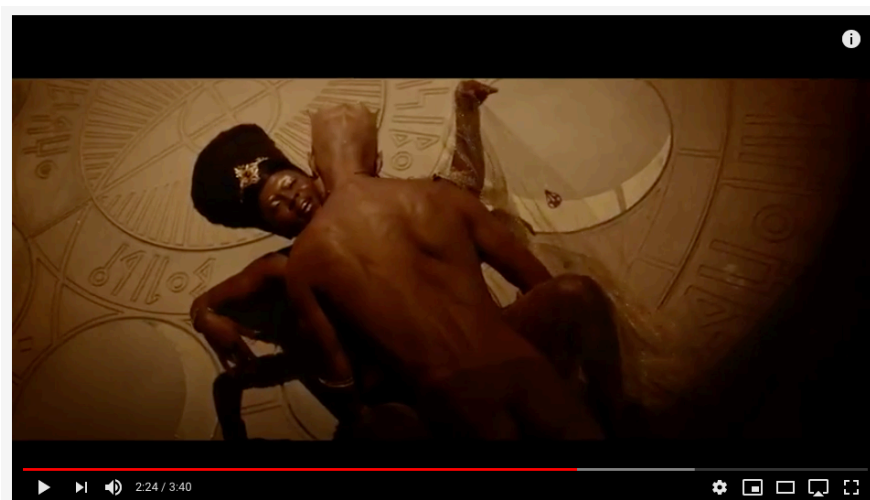
<https://www.artic.edu/artists/9960/eva-gonzales>

Jessica Pallington's perfectly enjoyable book *Lipstick: A Celebration of the World's Favorite Cosmetic* draws together all sorts of psychoanalytic and pop psych readings of not only lipstick's function but also symbolism. To crudely summarize, it has long been associated with female empowerment, oral sexual fantasies, deceit, prostitution, and a woozy self-care feminism. Unstable and contradictory like all of my favorite free floating signifiers, I would say that lipstick

is synonymous with women's rage, and that is a kind of rage that is inside of me, too. Just as Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément argue that so-called 'hysteria' is *jouissance* forced into the oppression of capitalism, in its composure, in its put-together-ness, formalism, fashion, idealization, luxury, impassivity, sealant, finishing touch, this is a material gesture that signals flushed faces and feelings, belied, repressed, looming frustration. Hysteria is *jouissance*. Elegance is violence. Lipstick is female fury.



Leonora Carrington. *Sanctuary for Furies*, 1974  
Oil on canvas, 39 x 27 in



Scene with the goddess Bilquis in *American Gods*, S1E8

Much has been made of the advent of new levels of casualism under our present regime of Zoom meetings, news reporters wearing shorts that sneak into frame, and new native advertising for desktop ring lamps, shine reducing powders, and other production tricks scaled to our domicile-bound office work to be able to appear before one another in the cabinets of curiosities that are conjured with each virtual meeting, arranged in rows like rare, exotic trifles. We're lurching through a shift in what slides into public spheres, as the expendability of the bustle and petticoat, or the invention of the bikini, or the prevalence of VPL in grey sweatpants similarly challenged how conceptions of embodiment, sexuality, propriety, and [the purpose of] respectability could be agreed upon at a societal level.



Neda Al-Hilali. *Gate of Gipar*, 1986  
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas  
<https://art.famsf.org/neda-al-hilali/gate-gipar-2008757>

If this is a critical threshold, it might be the Gate of Gipar, the Babylonian residence of the priestesses of the goddess Inanna, in ruins, in stages of restoration, in or outside of memory. Inanna is one of the ancient goddesses of love and sex and sensuality. I've been thinking about her since encountering a deeper representation of the work and career of Neda Al-Hilali, who's included in LA MOCA's *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972–1985*.

If you want to see the eyes of the art world's patriarchy glaze over, start talking about the Pattern and Decoration movement. Or perhaps even talk about cosmetics as a critical lens through which to analyze how identity and power is structured not only within societal systems but also the aesthetic orders of art historical canons. Or build a course for undergraduate painters that explores the potential for decoration, ornament, and abstraction to catalyze new sensitivities around the ways that geopolitical power has been sorted into East and West, haunted by those desiring, appropriative impulses of orientalism.

havingavisceralreaction

Tierra Perry  
July 10 at 1:36 PM · 🌐

Ladies which concealer is good to use when filling in your eyebrows? Ive never filled mines in before but I want to have that full look when I try to make up my face. I heard Nars brand was good but its very expe....ok the men have stopped reading by now. How do yall be getting these old men to pay yall bills?

Monjula Ray  
@queerBengali

I have so little patience with men complaining about wearing masks.  
I wear a thick bra with an underwire so you fuckers won't get distracted with my nipples during meetings and you can't cover your face to prevent people from dying?  
Wtf is wrong with you?

9:04 AM · 5/11/20 · Twitter for iPhone

Me and my bestie prepping our toes to sell foot pics on the internet since we're broke AF



havingavisceralreaction

Tomi Obaro  
@TomiObaro

I just don't see bras making a comeback after this

3:47 PM · 11 May 20 · Twitter Web App

30.3K Retweets 185K Likes

128 likes

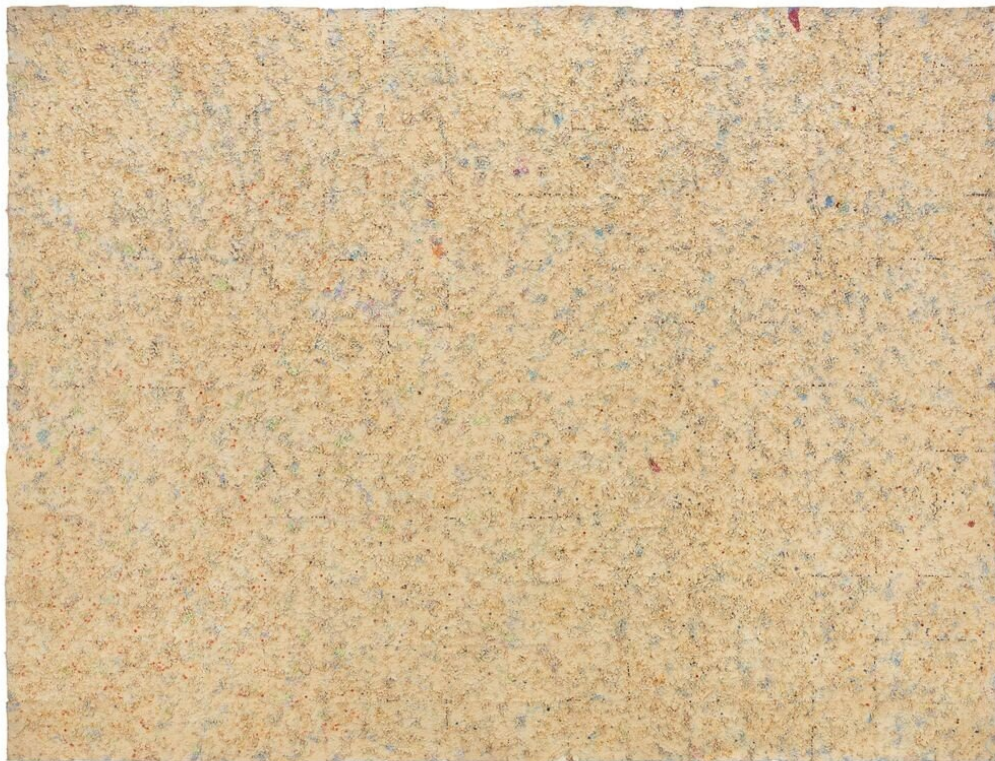
@dracomallfoys

when ur a grumpy ass, troll-like person by nature but still really want to maintain a soft and feminine aesthetic



Al-Hilali's work belongs to a generation of mostly women whose practices resisted easy categorization in one movement or another, and at different times were associated with feminist art, post-minimalism, pattern and decoration, and craft traditions. These practices dissented from not only the ideologies of monolithic, patriarchal treatments of Art, but even worked around and beside and away from the formats that had been privileged in the canon. Instead, these practices are circumnavigating shapeshifters, critical of how art exists in time and space, often ephemeral, often superficial and contingent, altered by the environments in which they were presented. Al-Hilali's surfaces are bound up in feathery compositional tensions, more impressionistic than the precision of geometric abstraction that proceeded from Minimalism.

Al-Hilali's material approaches share something with Karinne Smith's *Pinkies*, as well as the ruffly textile installations of Rosemary Mayer and some of my all time favorite artworks, Howardena Pindell's post-minimalist and yet excessively maximalist surfaces from the late 1970s in which every sort of painting application and collage technique and stenciling and glitter are imbricated across unstretched canvases, and often fugitive materials like talcum powders and perfumes were also layered into these rich complications.



Howardena Pindell. *Untitled #20 (Dutch Wives Circled and Squared)*, 1978. Mixed media on canvas; 86 × 110 in. (218.4 × 279.4 cm).

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Albert A. Robin by exchange, 2014.15.<https://mcachicago.org/Collection/Items/1978/Howardena-Pindell-Untitled-20-Dutch-Wives-Circled-And-1978>

To even start to conceptualize the fraught psychological powerplays that contribute to the histories of fashion and cosmetics, to recognize the novel and crude innovations that enlist crushed cochineal beetles, by-products of the petrochemical industry, happy accidents, and colonizing Occidents into the ingredients and technologies that produce makeup, to note the trade routes, war games, mythologies, witchcraft accusations, and gender-nonconforming dissidents who populate the historiographic erogenous zones marked out with rouge, with mauve, with powdered white skin, with yellow skin, with brown and black skin, is to concede that when Britney Spears purrs, “Whoever said that beauty on the inside is a liar” (“Drop Dead Beautiful,” 2011), her phrasing does not simply signal the privileges of naturalized beauty normativities, but goes further to underscore the site of contention that comprises the surfaces of people, places, and things. Were one to track the vestiges of how territories have been claimed with say, a planted flag, a bloodied battle field, a mistress’ lipstick smudge on his shirt collar, or the trail of an intoxicating perfume, and moreso the ways women and femme artists have been recovering [from] these gestures, then, true enough, as another blonde bombshell croons, “A kiss may be grand but it won’t pay the rental,” and yet it still may mark out the ring around someone screaming, around a gender insubordinated, a marker for objects (and those who have been objectified) to animate into what Christian Dior called a Flower Woman, but she turns out to be more gorgon than debutante. Britney sings of a beauty that will drop something dead, or perhaps more succinctly, beauty kills. She continues: “It’s going to be a bumpy ride.”



Candice Lin. *You are a parasite*, 2015

Fiberglass and polyester resin, acrylic paint, papier-maché, foam, cochineal-dyed sheepskins and acrylic faux sheepskins, cordyceps tea and other offerings. 91 x 134 x 139 inches

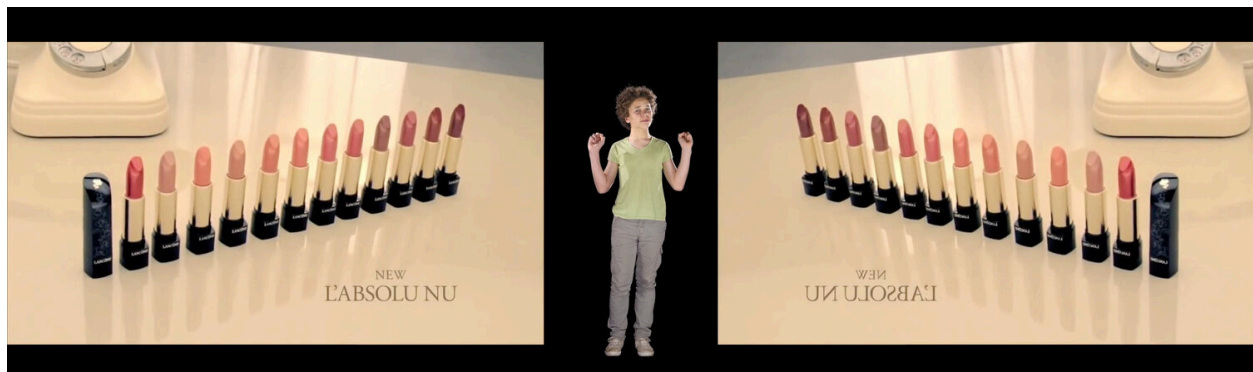
Detail view

<http://ghebaly.com/work/candicelin/>

I believe there's plenty that we have not yet understood, have not yet agreed upon, about how we [are made to] appear to one another. When I consider how identity has functioned historically, it has been as an imposed, regulative force—one that interlocks with appearances that aren't manifest from within but are projected onto the more or less receptive exterior surfaces of our lived experiences. I'm quite unsure of the efficacy by which self expression operates as self determination.

Put another way: the capacity for expression does violence insofar as it deviates from the received projections of identification under which we suffer. Fashion is, after a fashion, a struggle to establish the power relationships between the degrees to which we are structurally controlled and the degrees to which we might, among other things, signal tribally toward the end of survival. Lipstick, blush, arguably even painting per se, are attempts at simulating shifts in complexion, in the coloration of the skin, the canvas, your face, my tear stained face. It is certainly, literally, a form of glamour, as in enchantment—magic that uses the materials of this world to intervene into dominant systems of power. The stakes of using glamour to change one's skin color are quite high. Think of how white European aristocracies powdered its skins to appear pale, effortless, without disease, without labor and toil. But consider too the legitimate concerns among Black Americans that wearing face masks could prove life threatening because of the abhorrent arithmetic by which white supremacists in the United States equate blackness and face covering with criminality.

Janelle Monae sings in her 2018 "Screwed": "Everything is sex/ Except sex, which is power/ You know power is just sex/ Now ask yourself who's screwing you." Pivoting between these lines are unclear value assignments for how appearance relates to an unpredictable social order, how identity is certainly not coextensive with selfhood, and the nebulous form of desire—including its source/s, and the weight and impact of how desires conflict.

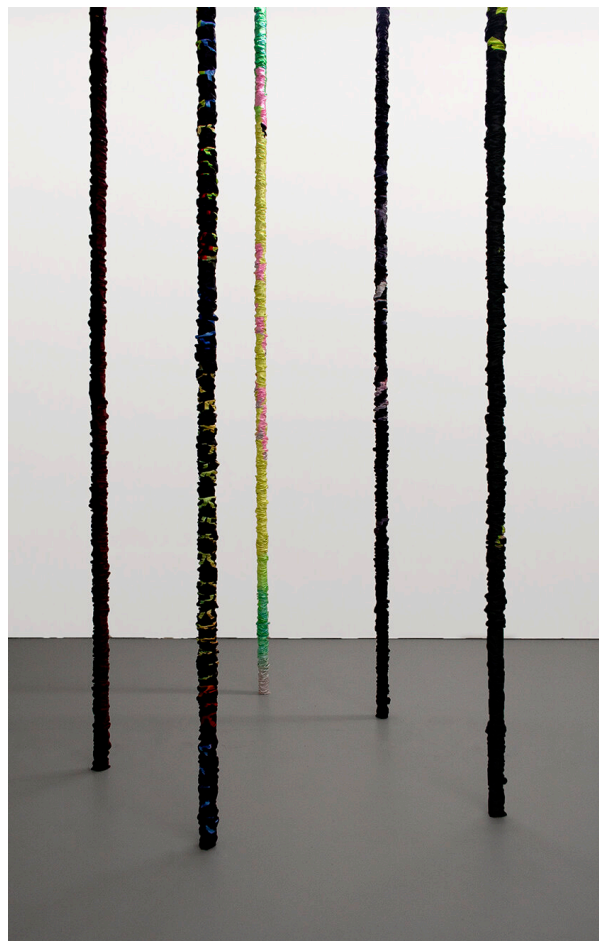


Candice Breitz. *TLDR*, 20173-channel video, 1 hour  
<https://artbma.org/exhibitions/digital/breitz/tldr.html>

Upon the public closure of the Baltimore Museum of Art's exhibition of multi-channel video works by South African Candice Breitz, the museum made composite videos of the installations available for screening online in their entirety. The effect is, of course, different from what we

would experience in a gallery space, but I'm also grateful to be able to spend time with the length of these works. *TLDR*, 2017, first commissioned by the B3 Biennial of the Moving Image, Frankfurt, was made in dialogue with and about conditions among sex workers. The content generated therein delves into the interstices of gender and race, while placing particular pressure not only on class and wage systems, but also on the ways that labor is conceived—both particularly and abstractly. Beyond evocative imagery and compelling arguments, Breitz's work is timely as the COVID pandemic has further clarified the established systemic hostilities toward people of color, disabled people, unsheltered populations surviving poverty, US residents who are not citizens, those who are aging, and workforces who were [always] already burdened with compulsory precariousness.

Lipstick, probably more so than Monet's waterlily paintings, is a mad enchantment. It lays velvety across the edges of language's impact. When I talk to women about lipstick, some of them tell me they observe men finding it scary: its potential to stain or rub off, its emphasis on its wearer's capacity for pleasure. The lipstick effect is not only an indicator for economic turbulence, but also a harbinger of something small and deadly held in her/my hand, pocket, purse, pocketbook.



Matt Morris. *FEMALE FURIES*, 2019

Digitally printed ruched satin

From left: *STOMPA*, *GRANNY GOODNESS*, *HARRIET*, *LASHINA*, *BERNADETH*

In Greek mythology, the Furies were born at the same time as Aphrodite. Titus Cronus castrated his father Uranus and threw his genitalia into the sea. The love goddess appeared from crests of seafoam. The furies grew from droplets of blood from the daddy dick that had fallen onto the ground. Legendary comic creator Jack Kirby borrowed from this mythology when he invented a group of sadistic warrior women characters for DC Comics in the early 1970s. These marvelous, spectacular characters were the starting place for my *FEMALE FURIES*, standing erect like lipsticks in a department store display, or like caryatid, or like dryads, or like furies. Each character provides an alternative flavor for outrage, and none eschew violence as a baseline strategy.

Iconically, red lipstick which had long served as a sign of a woman's promiscuity, was adopted as a symbol in suffrage efforts at the start of the twentieth century. These speculative paragraphs of mine may be treated similarly as a sort of 'joining up.' The artists, musicians, memes, and references that circulate through this text have been among the most grounding points for my means of orientation over the past few months. This past week I finished teaching a very demanding spring semester, and I feel privileged and grateful that my institution is honoring our employment contracts, and I will continue to be paid through the summer. I'm thinking there has to be a counterpoint to the sound and the furies that is perhaps more silent, more withdrawn. I'm thinking I'll put on a pale mauve lip for the occasion.

*Matt Morris is an artist, writer, and educator who has recently been exploring the complexities of power relationships through projects in painting, perfumery, soft pastel drawings, and millinery. By excavating and repeating signs drawn from advertising, fashion, and art history across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Morris works in a space of tension between beauty as a historical question of aesthetics and beauty as a multi-billion dollar global industry, monitoring the issues of class, sexuality, race, and gender these spheres excite. Morris is an essayist for the perfume website Fragrantica, and a regular contributor to such art publications as Flash Art, X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly, and [artforum.com](http://artforum.com). Morris' art projects have been exhibited nationally and internationally, with recent exhibitions with RUSCHMAN in Berlin; The Suburban in Milwaukee, WI; Krabbesholm Højskole in Skive, Denmark; Tiger Strikes Asteroid in Brooklyn, NY; and DePaul Art Museum, Chicago, IL. Morris is an adjunct professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.*

**<https://www.trestlegallery.org/matt-morris>**