



### THROUGH A FEMALE LENS: THE BODY ELECTRIC

*The Body Electric*, a new exhibition opening at The National Gallery of Australia, will put a focus on the human experience of sex, pleasure, and desire through the eyes of women.

An initiative of the Know My Name project, which celebrates the contribution of women, *The Body Electric* features work by pioneering figures of photography and video. On display are celebrations of a woman's erotic experience by feminist artists such as Carolee Schneemann and Annette Messager; stories of intimacy and the emotional experience of love by Nan Goldin and Momo Okabe; and pictures that deal with the pleasures and repressions of sexuality by Pat Brassington and Jo Ann Callis.

*The Body Electric* is the first new exhibition open to the public following the temporary closure of the National Gallery due to COVID-19. Many of the works were installed while the building was closed and staff were practicing social distancing – a strange experience for *The Body Electric* curators Shaune Lakin and Anne O'Hehir, given the intimate nature of the subject matter.

The curators believe the exhibition will have a certain resonance for audiences given the times and people's different experiences of isolation and, for some, the lengthy absence of human touch.

“This show reminds us there are different ways to think about relationships,” Lakin said. “Certainly, the old, some might say, patriarchal, way hasn’t always served us well, and these images remind us how really important social relationships are to the human experience.”

O’Hehir said women photographers brought a nuanced way of thinking about intimacy and social relationships, and about their place in the world.

“It’s a deeply sensual and beautiful way of seeing,” she said. “As a society, we are so used to the notion of women as objects and these artists show us what we are missing through that traditional gendered lens that we place on the world.”

*The Body Electric* overturns the notion of the ‘male gaze’, or the idea that women are objectified by photography and video, there to be looked at and desired, as spectacles and sexual objects. Women artists working with these mediums have actively resisted the male gaze, turning the camera on themselves and others to show women as active participants in sex, pleasure, and intimacy.

Their work challenges the ways that photography and film have historically positioned women as passive objects. It might also point to new forms of social and intimate relationships, as many people move out of spatial isolation and into a world where the act of touching or holding someone else will open-up new possibilities.

The exhibition includes a range of works, including a major new triptych by Australian artist Lillian O’Neil *Private period impersonating something quite strange* 2020. O’Neil uses collage to explore a dystopian narrative where people are unable to properly connect with each other or the place they inhabit, of a world in ruin.

O’Neil said it was cathartic to reverse the gaze: “The public archives hold the history of accessible and publicly acceptable erotic narratives and make it shatteringly plain that the male gaze rules supreme. I am interested in searching for other perspectives, as well as making my own.”

*The Body Electric* contains works by Lynda Benglis, Polly Borland, Pat Brassington, Sophie Calle, Jo Ann Callis, Charis (and George Schwarz), Cheryl Donegan, Christine Godden, Nan Goldin, Petrina Hicks, Mayumi Hosokura, Claire Lambe, Pixy Liao, Anne McDonald, Annette Messenger, Tracey Moffatt, Momo Okabe, Lillian O’Neil, Fiona Pardington, Carolee Schneemann, Collier Schorr, Cindy Sherman, Annie Sprinkle, Lyndal Walker and Franchesca Woodman.

*The Body Electric* is a [Know My Name](#) project supported by The [Medich Foundation](#). It is on display at the National Gallery of Australia until January 2021. Entry is free.

**Thursday Art Talk** | Thursday, 10 September 2020 | [Bookings required](#)

#### **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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Media images available [here](#).

Please be advised that this exhibition includes works with adult content. It is not suitable for children.

Image: Claire Lambe, *Untitled (red Emily)* 2017, chromogenic photograph, 94 (h) x 140 (w) cm, image courtesy of the artist and Sarah Scout Presents