

Reba Maybury

Private Life

Part One

The impressionist artist Edgar Degas created a series of pastel drawings of naked women washing and drying themselves in late 19th-century Paris. He said: “The nude has always been represented in poses which presuppose an audience. But my women are simple, honest creatures who are concerned with nothing beyond their physical occupations... it is as if you were looking through a keyhole at their innocence.”

These works by Degas were both celebrated and criticized at the time for the originality of the “ungainly positions” in which the women were depicted, and the painter’s perspective of the works, as if the viewer was looming over the women. This praise stemmed from an apparent inventiveness for the time, in terms of their perspective, looking more like camera shots than classically composed figures posing in easily understood and conscious portraiture. In these paintings, there is a sense that the women’s preoccupied bodies were being zoomed into without their knowledge.

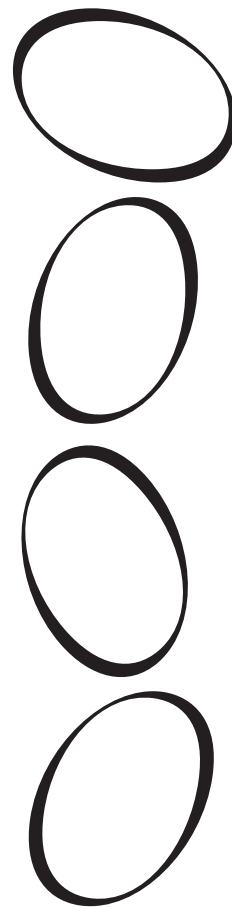
Degas never painted these women’s faces. His skill was applauded. According to Degas: “Women can never forgive me; they hate me, they feel that I am disarming them. I show them in their coquetry.”

“Paint-by-numbers” are self-contained painting kits designed to facilitate a pre-designed image. They generally include brushes, tubs of paint with numbered labels, and a canvas printed with borders and numbers. The user selects the color corresponding to one of the numbers then uses it to fill in a delineated section of the canvas, in a manner similar to a coloring book. The act of ordering my submissive men to complete a paint-by-numbers kit for me is a way for them to have an experience of art without being the artist, a relaxing activity for adults that bears no demands for creativity but instead relaxation.

This is not unlike a john visiting a sex worker or a tourist visiting a city—a consumable experience of leisure that takes no responsibility for the culture, politics, or well-being of the place or the person you pay to visit. It is widely understood that the women who posed for Degas were sex workers. Washing is one of the unseen labors of the sex work profession, and women’s work, regardless of their profession, is often to clean up after men. I have tried to discover the exact amount of works by Degas of women washing themselves but I cannot find a number; it is, however, a lot.

Does this classify as an obsession? There is a bland innocuousness to these images of women’s faceless, naked bodies being spied upon; the ordinariness of their naked bodies now fades into art history. And I suppose that is what is most insidious about abuse: its banality.

Who watches the watcher?



30 August – 26 October 2025

Part Two

Surveillance is an omnipresent reality in modern life and some people are always watched more than others. Some people, in fact, feel entitled to watching more than others. So much so that this becomes a dim element of human existence.

Evidence in and of itself can produce the most extraordinary feelings of patheticness to look at. Evidence is often a small sad thing in its materiality in comparison to the grandiosity of the act.

Is watching someone without that person’s knowledge a *clean* act?

Sometimes evidence is outrageous in its validity but the punishment will simply not exist. Lots of people get away with crimes even with the most plentiful of evidence. Sometimes even with the most structured of evidence, a criminal in question will be made into a hero.

When asking a sample of my submissives of different ages and backgrounds which crimes they have committed, they have admitted to speeding, urinating in public, buying and consuming illegal drugs, drunk driving, petty shoplifting, traveling without a ticket on public transport, and sometimes physical fights with other men or disobedience at protests. Crimes against women are never mentioned. Does this mean that crimes against women do not exist?

Are the women in Degas’s images of women washing real women? Is looking at these women’s bodies a cheap thrill or an *expensive* one?

It is usually implied that the voyeur is a man, hence the popular notion of the “peeping tom.”

A private life that is difficult to grasp, to understand, to have access to, is all the more inviting to penetrate.

The desire to know how someone either survives or behaves in a private domestic sphere, in their own dirt, becomes all the more desirable the more precise the public image is.

Unfortunately, misogyny is genderless: it can and does possess the psyche of every gender.

How can we define pornography? Is the pornographic always sensational? And is what was sensational 100 years ago still a thrill now? Is what was spiritual 150 years ago still spiritual now? Is voyeurism spiritual?

What position is the watcher in? What positions does he like best and who watches him? Standing, sat, crouching, all fours, kneeling, laying on the back or sides?

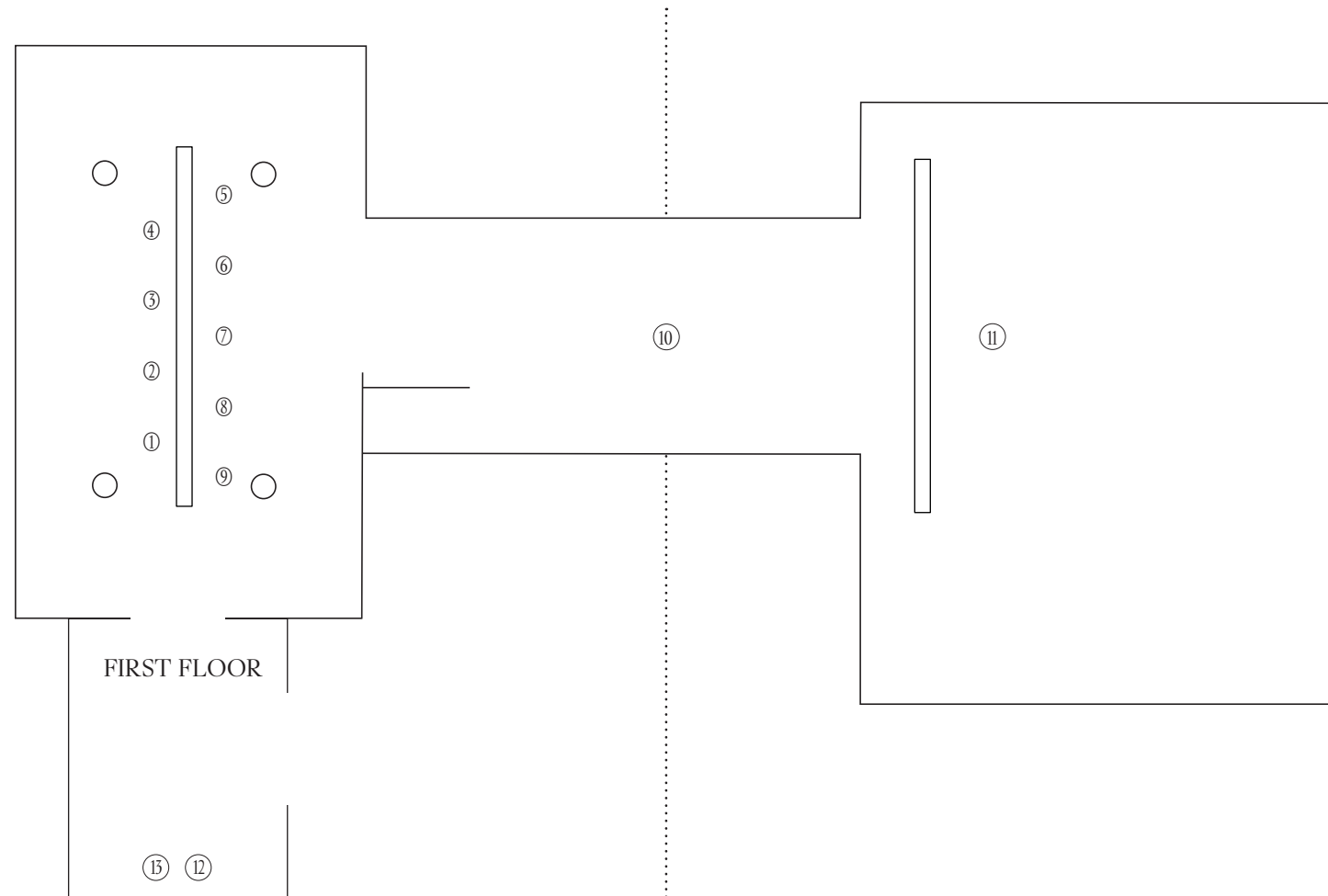
Fear is the antithesis of eroticism; to be truly scared stunts an orgasm’s potential to unfurl and orgasms are the best thing in the world.

Sometimes people want to penetrate others’ private lives.

Sometimes people want to destroy others and there lies an infinity pool of entitlement.

Sometimes I wish I was a decadent homosexual man and sometimes, if not most of the time, some people get away with things.

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① *Yet to be Named 4*, 22, UK, recently graduated English Graduate Teacher/ Socialist and in chastity, North East England, 2025
24 colors, acrylic on printed canvas
40 × 50 cm

② *no hobbies*, German Artist, mid-40s, Berlin, 2025
36 colors, acrylic on printed canvas
50 × 50 cm

③ *Amanda*, British retired Civil Servant and Cross Dresser, 60s Blackpool UK, 2, 2025
36 colors, acrylic on printed canvas
60 × 40 cm

④ *Number*, British, 42, IT Service Management, The Midlands, UK, 2025
24 colors acrylic on printed canvas
50 × 40 cm

⑤ *Amanda*, British retired Civil Servant and Cross Dresser, 60s Blackpool UK, 2025
48 colors, acrylic on printed canvas
50 × 50 cm

⑥ *Masterpiece*, 61, British Online Content Creator and Boot Fetishist, London, UK, 2025
24 colors, acrylic on printed canvas
50 × 40 cm

⑦ *Francis Bacon*, German, Junior Art Advisor, 28, London, 2025
24 colors, acrylic paint on printed canvas
40 × 40 cm

⑧ *Minute*, Italian Web Developer, Giantess Fetishist, 42 years old, Tuscany, Italy, 2025
36 colors, acrylic on printed canvas
40 × 30 cm

⑨ *White Album*, Danish Business Student, 25, Copenhagen, Denmark - unfinished, 2025
36 colors, acrylic on printed canvas
50 × 50 cm

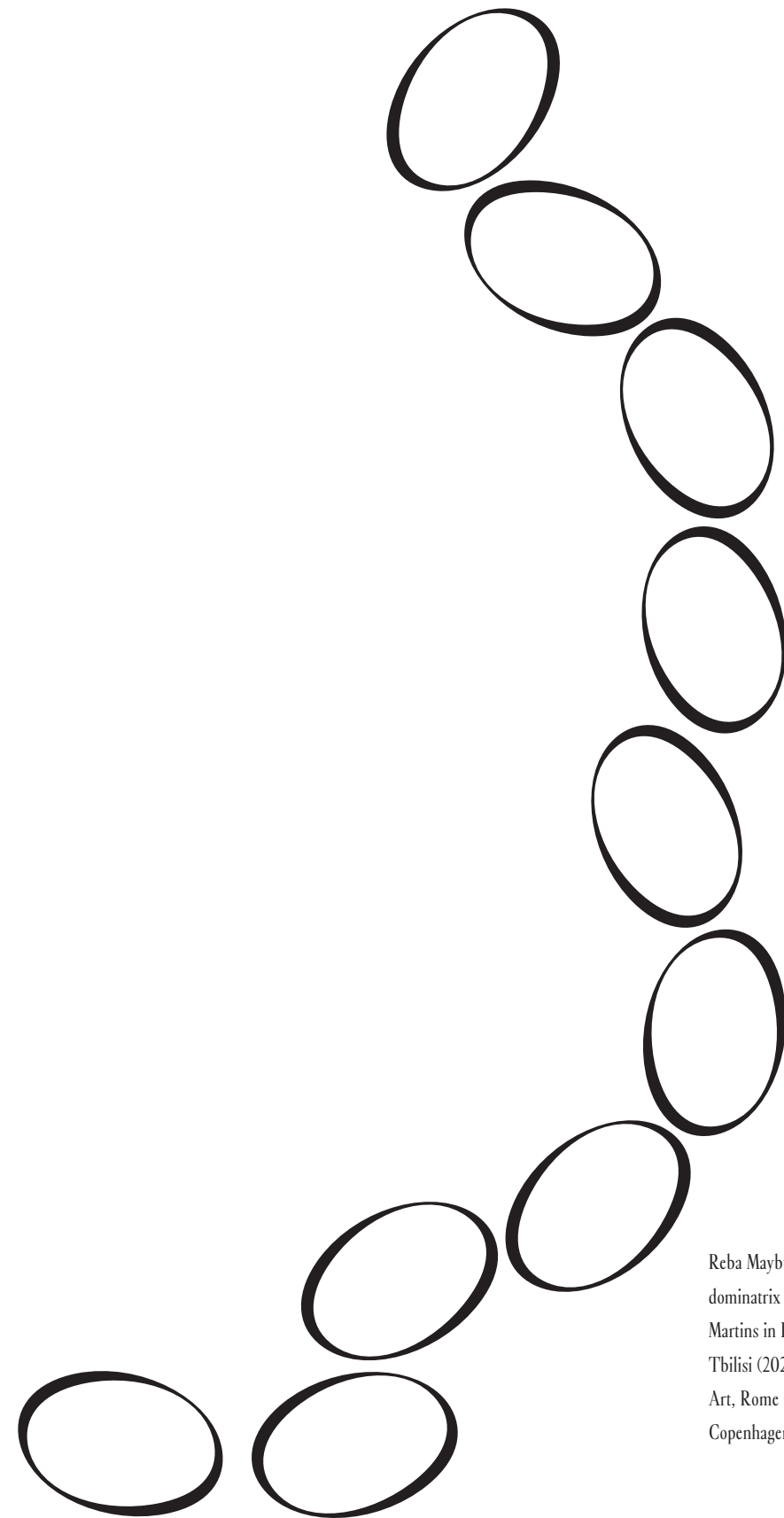
⑩ *Inspired by Sauvage*, 2025
Two plug-in aroma oil diffusers, plastic, vegan and cruelty free fragrance oil

⑪ Three CCTV cameras at a two minute delay, projection oscillates between two second and eight second footage

⑫ *Note to Mistress Rebecca from Masterpiece*, 2025
Postcard of *Jacob and the Angel* by Sir Jacob Epstein from the Tate, London
Indian ink
21 × 14.8 cm

⑬ *Work tally for Mistress Rebecca by Yet to be Named 4*, 2025
Paper and pen
29.7 × 21 cm

30 August – 26 October 2025



Reba Maybury (b. 1990) is a British visual artist, writer, and political dominatrix based in Funder near Silkeborg. She graduated from Central Saint Martins in London (2015) and has exhibited at venues including LC Queisser, Tbilisi (2025); Company Gallery, New York (2024); Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome (2021); HFKD, Holstebro (2021); Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2020); and LUMA Westbau, Zurich (2019).