

The background of the cover is an abstract composition of torn paper and ink. Large, irregular shapes of gold, cream, and light blue are layered over a dark brown base. Small, scattered purple and pink specks are visible throughout the composition. Two solid black dots are positioned on the left side of the cover.

Reba Maybury

Private Life

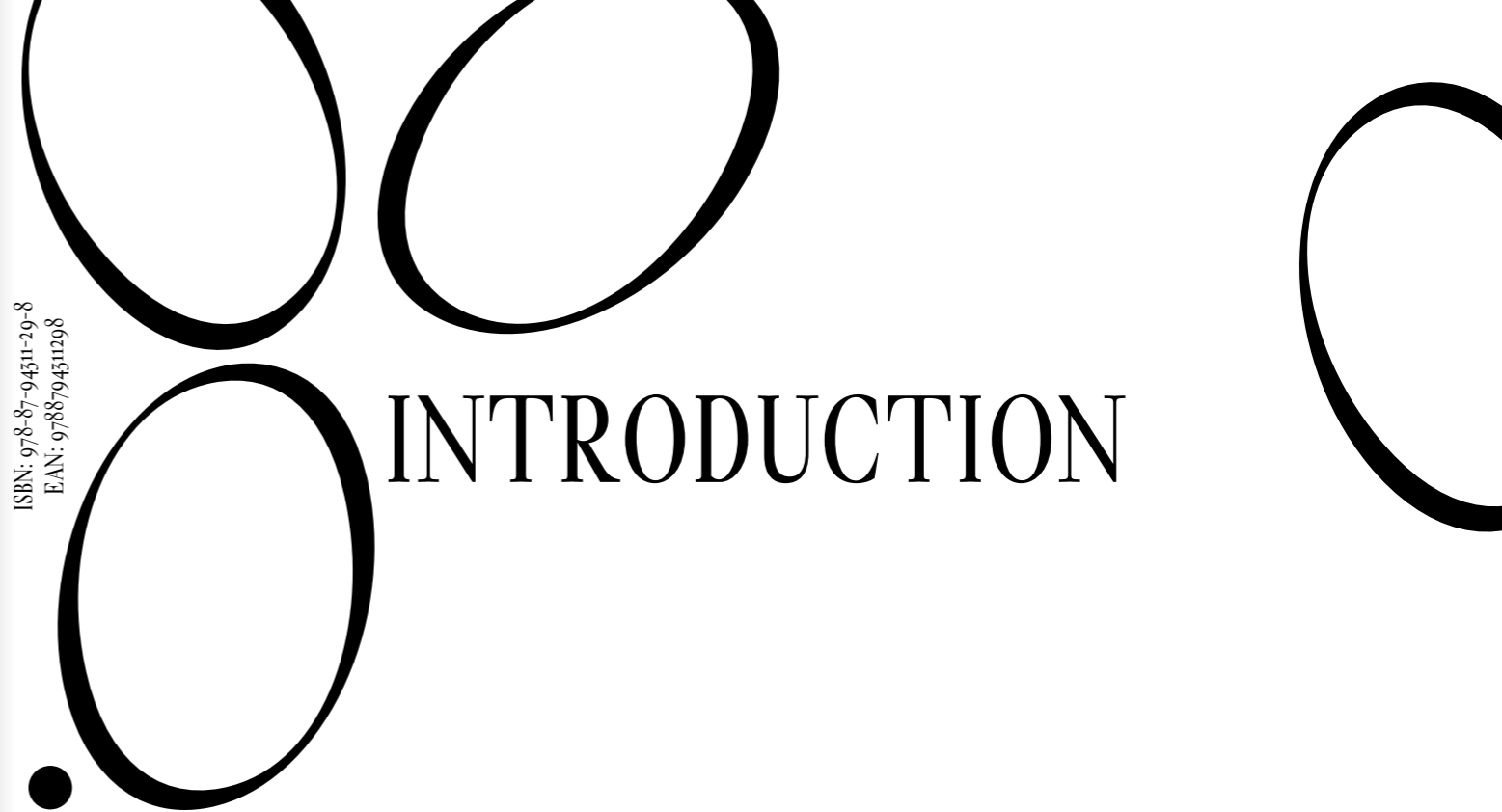


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Reba Maybury
Private Life
Exhibition period: 30.08.2025 – 26.10.2025

O—OVERGADEN
Overgaden nedén Vædet 17, 1414 København K,
overgaden.org



INTRODUCTION

It is a great pleasure to introduce this publication accompanying Reba Maybury's solo exhibition *Private Life* at O—Overgaden. Throughout the past few years O—Overgaden has, with the generous support of the Augustinus Foundation, published a monographic series in conjunction with our large-scale solo exhibitions, aiming to expand the conversations around each show and produce new, offspring material.

In this edition, writer and curator Hugo Bausch Belbachir has contributed an essay on the ambivalence of voyeurism and the male gaze in relation to Maybury's work—a warm thank you for this piece of thinking. Moreover, Maybury herself has written a text about the two parts of the exhibition and about one of her previous Danish submissives. I wish to thank the whole team at O—Overgaden for their efforts in realizing the exhibition, as well as the graphic design team at fanfare for their always dedicated work, and of course not least the artist, Reba, for generously sharing conceptualizations, co-thinking, and writing with all of us, through both the exhibition and this publication.

Reba Maybury's artistic practice harnesses her role as a dominatrix with the alias Mistress Rebecca: most of her artworks are instruction pieces carried out by her submissive men under her orders.

At O—Overgaden, Maybury shows a 2025 painting series based on paint-by-numbers kits. The series reproduces a suite of pastels on paper by the French impressionist painter Edgar Degas depicting working-class women—widely thought to be sex workers—washing. Shown in “ungainly positions,” the frame-filling female nudes are carrying out the unseen labor of intimacy or sex work: keeping the body clean. In this series, Degas's framing is inherently voyeuristic,

watching the women from behind or with their faces turned away, as depersonalized, consumable bodies that do not look back. While Degas's heralded series seems to hide its inherent male dominance in subtle light and soft colors, the crude grittiness of the submissives' reproductions reveals a brutal reality to the motifs.

In O—Overgaden's second space, scent diffusers distribute a counterfeit version of Dior's cologne *Sauvage*, the French word meaning rough, offensive, or savage. The face of the cologne for the last ten years has been Johnny Depp, the actor simultaneously accused of domestic abuse by his ex-partner, Amber Heard, in two highly publicized court cases. During trial, Depp's defense team employed the recurrent strategy “deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender” (DARVO) in which critique is deflected by inverting the roles of aggressor and victim. In 2023 Johnny Depp renewed his contract with Dior for \$20 million, the largest ever men's fragrance deal.

The back space introduces an element of surveillance: watching the audience watching the watched and washing women being sexualized even while completing this most banal of tasks. By outsourcing the menial labor of production, Maybury's practice plays out dynamics of domination and subjugation, inverting the roles of observing and observed, even aggressor and victim, layered into both our gendered, private lives and our public, cultural institutions. If the dominatrix as a sex worker is typically seen as a “dehumanized” fantasy—not unlike how the artist is often understood as society's entertaining underdog—here it is the submissives, and indeed also the visitors, that are put to work and watched, subverting and perverting the stereotypical image of who serves who.

Rhea Dall,
Director and Chief Curator, O—Overgaden,
September 2025

LABOR, VOYEURISM, AND THE GAZE: REBA MAYBURY AND THE USES OF THE EROTIC

Hugo Bausch Belbachir

Edgar Degas was a passionate frequenter of opera houses and theaters. He was fascinated by the gestures of dancers; his friends claimed he could effortlessly perform an arabesque or entrechat himself. He especially enjoyed attending rehearsals, where he observed the dancers, not in performance, but at rest, backs bent in contrast to the rigid posture demanded by the dance, facial expressions revealing the strain and discomfort that the spectacle required them to conceal. Seated, stretching, exhausted, their bodies ached with a kind of undignified fatigue. Another man could often be seen sitting nearby, at the periphery of the stage; he was the *protecteur*, who might one day make one of them his next *cocotte*.¹

The artist's interest in such elements of labor reflected a fascination for the modern conditions of women's subjugation; the recurring presence of women *à la tâche* (at task)—dancers, laundresses, housewives, and the like, then *à la mode* (trendy) in modern literature, with Émile Zola admitting to having drawn inspiration from Degas's working women and, in particular, to their fatigue, for his 1877 novel *L'Assommoir*.

Degas's numerous nudes are rooted in the classical manner of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (who he met when he was a young student), in the arabesque line, while gradually reinterpreting his representational system towards a more sinuous, less idealized attitude. The poses became deliberately unguarded, abandoned in favor of movement, the compositions adopting a documentary-like framing. The rawness of his series in pastels, depicting women at their toilette, fully demystified the figures, showing a sort of women's lassitude,

only acknowledged through the pleasure of the masculine voyeuristic experience of looking.

This gaze—often revealed in Degas's paintings by the presence of a man in the image, and repeated by the artist himself within the process of painting—indicates the social position of the dancers, at the end of the 19th century, at the very edge of respectability and within similar margins as the prostitute. Ballerinas came from modest socio-economic backgrounds and received only a meager pension from the opera. They were frequently compensated financially in exchange for sexual favors granted to their patrons. Their stage costumes, marked by a form of semi-nudity (upper chest, neck, shoulders, and legs exposed), stood in stark contrast to the bourgeois dress codes. Male patrons, the *abonnés*, such as Degas, were granted privileged access to backstage rehearsals. Upon request, they could discreetly approach the *maquerelle* (a chaperone or intermediary figure stationed near the wings) and arrange to meet a dancer in a separate, private room.

For the reproduction of Edgar Degas's series of pastel paintings, Reba Maybury enlisted some of the submissives who had previously participated in the 2022 reproduction of Toulouse-Lautrec's *The Medical Inspection* (1894). This other painting depicted two women, sex workers, awaiting a medical check-up in a Parisian brothel. Both women had rolled up their dresses to above their waists, in a state of semi-nudity and partial exposure of their bodies—this “interchangeable element of sex work”²—anticipating the doctor's verdict. If they showed signs of venereal disease, such as syphilis (the 19th century's destroyer of the bourgeois status quo), they would be sent to prison. Similarly, within Degas's compositions, female figures are recurrently rendered in a state of undress, their bodies positioned in compromised, often crouching postures, predominantly seen from behind, emphasizing physical subjugation. Crucially, their own gaze is denied any possibility of transcendence; it remains confined to the immediacy of their own domestic or bodily task, never permitted to rise above labor.

The ideological logic of sex work, through the lens of its historical, cultural, and political external limitations, is fundamentally understood in terms of economic value, wherein the “prostitute” and her labor are institutionally commodified. The association between this state and modern capitalism, as explored in the work of Reba Maybury and her simultaneous experience as Mistress Rebecca, lies precisely in the inversion of this established system of transactional exchange. The “client” assumes the position of the submissive, becoming both the commodity of production and exchange (the titles of each reproduction painting adopting the name attributed to the submissive by Mistress Rebecca), while the total absorption of their value occurs,

directing the sex worker towards a sovereign position retaining complete autonomy, both morally and in action. In *Faster Than An Erection* (2024), Reba Maybury writes:

Fetish is an area of the absurd because it is inherently about an infatuation with what is dead. When I am fetishized for My strength as a Woman I must not allow the attraction of these men towards Me to be an attraction to someone without a heartbeat, but rather a desire rooted in action. I am not an object, nor a play thing. My autonomy is palpable and much like an orgasm I am formlessly alive.³

When writing, Reba Maybury refers to herself as *Me*, with a capital M, women as *She* or *Her*—and *he*, for men, with a lowercase h. Having moved recently from England and now living in Denmark, the artist has come to realize that the façade of gender equality within the country appears to distort the dynamics of the Dominatrix/submissive relationship. She witnessed that many of the submissive men she has encountered maintain the belief that equality prevails between them, thereby obstructing both the possibility of absolute control on the part of Mistress Rebecca, and the full enactment of submission on theirs. In response, the artist wonders: “Are there any really submissive men in Denmark with kindness for Women, and respect out there?”

This deployment in the values of the erotic can be traced as part of a historical reclamation of such a resource as inherently tied to individual power, deeply embedded in the unarticulated and unacknowledged realms of women's experience. In line with the theoretical framework structured by Audre Lorde, particularly in “The Uses of the Erotic, The Erotic as Power,” this dynamic is marked by the understanding of its repression when expressed through female subjects, often distorted as antithetical to the prevailing norms of social and political power.⁴ Through her engagement with these notions both within the context of her dominatrix practice and in their incorporation into analytical and conceptual domains, Reba Maybury reframes the erotic as a source of self-proclaimed and self-possessed power—an intrinsic force embedded within women's personal and collective experience—thus challenging its historical vilification, marginalization, and devaluation within Western society.

One could wonder, what happens when we re-code commodity exchange from the side of labor—by selling objects back to capital, so to speak—in order to claim a sense of autonomy for the object in an act of recirculation? The trajectory unfolds as follows:

3. Ibid.

4. Audre Lorde, “The Uses of the Erotic, The Erotic as Power,” paper delivered at the Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Mount Holyoke College, 25 August 1978; later published as a pamphlet by Out & Out Books, available from The Crossing Press; reprinted in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde, Crossing Press, 1984.

There is Degas's painting, its posterity (that is, the authoritative discourse of art history), and, ultimately, its reproduction through the conceptual gesture of Reba Maybury. Throughout this entire trajectory, over time, the experience of male domination over women remains existentially intact. At every layer of history. The violence is the same. And it is precisely this knowledge that allows Reba Maybury's paintings—produced *outside* of herself, within the experience of Mistress Rebecca—to generate a system that disrupts the forward motion of the painting—and, therefore, art history—from concept to object, reversing it, from object back to concept. Here, the point is not primarily about a painting by Edgar Degas, but rather an entire system of gender domination and its representation through history. The experience of the subject's body, imprisoned in Degas's painting, is inseparable from the experience of Reba Maybury's body—as an artist, as a Dominatrix, as a woman. There is—both in Edgar Degas's 19th-century painting and in its 21st-century reiteration by Mistress Rebecca's submissives—the *same* woman stepping out of the frame; the experience of her body is singular to the experience of *all* women.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec admired Degas and studied his oeuvre closely. His exploration of the life of Paris prostitutes and dancers within this milieu, forever associated with the decadent, pre-bohemian extravaganza of the Moulin Rouge, derived directly from Degas's interest in portraying working-class women. This ideological framework has, in turn, been highly commodified in both painters' posthumous legacies, becoming a quintessential emblem of Parisian identity. The realism attributed to Degas became closely linked to the immense significance of end-of-the-century literature, as well as to the nostalgia frequently expressed by many historians for a sort of bohemian *laissez aller* (letting go).

Situated today within the ideological trajectory of French tourism, it serves to obscure any potential connection to the historical violence and gendered oppression faced by women. Edgar Degas's paintings of women at work situate a systemic humiliation of women, perpetually depicting them in a state of anticipation inherent to the violence of their imposed labor. The souvenir—here the reproduced painting and its objectification as such—becomes the consumption, not of the sex workers, but of the submissive *laboring* for Mistress Rebecca; the meticulous, precise, and invisible performance work synonymous with the female condition, inverted through the production and reproduction of that same historical condition by the male submissives. Their labor, as a result, and as a conjunction to women's work, is rendered invisible. In this same logic, the performative act of both sex and art is unsettled within a singular structure, a shared language, through the commodification not of the artist's body, but that of the submissive, as well as the object to which it refers as product. The relation, here, between sex and art, is one of interdependence.

1. Edgar Degas, *Rehearsal of a Ballet on Stage*, 1874.

2. Reba Maybury, *Faster Than An Erection*, Wet Satin Press, 2024.

Reba Maybury's engagement with authorship, commodification, and performance belongs to a radical lineage that includes Cosey Fanni Tutti, Andrea Fraser, and Sherrie Levine, among other feminist artists. It is within a similar spectatorial experience that its dynamic becomes operative; one of structural logics of the gaze, authoritarian discursivity, adoration and simultaneous repulsion of the image, the framing apparatus, and the subject's perceptual and affective engagement with the recursive reproduction of power structures within the institutional space of the museum *itself*.

I mean that the masculine viewer, too, occupies a position that is inextricably bound to the perpetuation of the power dynamic—the very act of their own looking. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was a voyeur. Edgar Degas was a voyeur. The male chaperone on stage with the dancers was a voyeur. The doctor inspecting sex workers was a voyeur. The clients were voyeurs. The painting itself is a voyeur. The museum is a voyeur. Its visitors are voyeurs. Sex work is inseparable from the male gaze. Women's bodies and consciousness are inseparable from male voyeurism.

The scandal surrounding Édouard Manet's *Olympia* at the 1865 Paris Salon was precisely rooted in an awareness of this voyeuristic experience—not toward the surface of the painting, but through it; that these men standing in front of it, in fact, had already experienced, in the space of the real, the body of this woman. The function of gender is precisely differentiated through the position of the one who looks, and the other who is looked at. The male viewer has always known perfectly well how to *behave* according to his own desires. He has known precisely how to adapt to the everyday, systemic, and political representation of gendered violence, of the exploitation of women's bodies, and consequently, of this pornography. The effective function of reversing the trajectory of this attitude—in Maybury's work; that is, in the experience of historical discourse and in the Western experience of art and sex—is tied to the methodologies of perpetuation of women's servitude. Degas's painting, like that of Toulouse-Lautrec, is inseparable from this ideology.

PRIVATE LIFE

Reba Maybury

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. "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?

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 150 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 to 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.

WHITE ALBUM, DANISH BUSINESS STUDENT, 25, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK – UNFINISHED, 2024

36 colors, acrylic on printed canvas, 50 × 50 cm unfinished

Reba Maybury

When I first meet a potential submissive, I will ask them a variety of questions in an attempt to gauge their masculinity and submissive nature. Asking submissive men about their taste in culture can be a very revealing way to build a portrait of their values and underlying political inclinations.

Upon asking this submissive man what his favorite record was, he told me that it is the *White Album* by The Beatles. It is commonly considered that The Beatles are the "best band in the world" and, alongside, that they could be considered architects of contemporary white masculinity. However, that being said, this choice as a favorite album of a 25-year-old in 2024 did seem rather strange. A song by Nina Simone was playing in the bar where we met and I asked him to identify whose voice it was. He didn't know the song or who She was and seemed unbothered by his ignorance. To me, this ambivalence was the biggest humiliation he could have experienced.

White Album was also astoundingly white. When he walked into the bar in Copenhagen where Myself and My Lady Lucille first met him, I thought he was a much older man, perhaps even in his 60s, hence his hair being such a shocking tone of blond. Wearing a white shirt with a collar minorly decorated in a flower print, pointed leather shoes, and suit trousers presented him as a man who only existed in a present that never needed to prove its existence, something that rejected the contemporary and embraced tradition and, with that, potentially youth too.

On White Album's fetish profile he posted a divine cartoon drawing of a straight couple marrying. The Bride, huge and buxom, was holding a lead that was attached around the genitals of the tiny, quivering naked groom, and the altar possessed a large Female logo with a Female-only selection of guests in the background. He said he has no interest in a relationship with a Woman where he isn't submissive, and that he has no interest in sex in any other way.

In the three years that I have lived in Denmark, I have failed to find a sturdy local submissive to serve Me. Are the statistics of gender equality that Danish democracy provides enough of a reason for many Danish men to think that the fight is over, that Women and men in Denmark really are equal, meaning that they can't really submit in a gendered sadomasochistic dynamic? Does this mean that they cannot believe, even in the realm of fantasy, that a Woman can be divinely superior? That they cannot even be below a Woman within the extravaganza of fantasy? Does this also mean Danish men do not believe in all the terrible things men do?

The Danish welfare state provides many progressive and wonderful interventions for people to live fully but that doesn't mean misogynic attitudes simply disappear with every new form of parental leave cover that emerges or statistics in gender equality in the work place. Unfortunately, misogyny is an ever-present form of violence that lingers everywhere and is in all of our minds, affecting how we think and act, whether we like it or not. It is only through being conscious of its ever-present atmosphere that we can be conscious to make changes with our own behavior.

Just consider the Nordic paradox: Denmark is a leading country for gender equality yet has disproportionately high rates of intimate partner violence against Women compared to other European nations.

Then there is the issue around the Law of Jante, from a 1933 satire of Scandinavian society based in a fictional Danish village, that has proven all too resonant in its observations. In this story, the people of the village look down upon ambitions for excellence, they consider thinking that you are above anyone else as the epitome of vulgarity, and it is considered better to keep your head down, remain a sheep, and fit in. Conformity is apparently good for society's general well-being. Protestantism drives a disapproval of decadence. If it is true that these attitudes run through Danish society, why would a Danish man see another person, and in this case a Dominatrix, as exceptional when equality apparently runs through his veins?

A Dominatrix is not a conformist. Her very existence is meant to go against normativity. She lives in a world where rules are turned upside down. Her practice is rooted in subverting existing hierarchies. She is glorified for her strength, stamina, and exceptionalism. And in a country like Denmark where hierarchy "apparently" does not exist and individuality is looked down upon,

even “satirically” this, so far, in My experience, has not proven fertile ground for female domination.

Often I have been told by other Danish Women that dating apps are full of submissive men. This leaves me with this question: Do these men want the experience of submitting without really wanting the Woman to be superior? Is this desire for submission purely one-sided?

Dominant Women are not here to serve submissive men. Having My submissives work for Me works as a way of them offering something to Me that actually makes Me more powerful and not just powerful within their fantasy. This was explained to White Album and he agreed to be used to make a painting for Me.

After realizing he would not be able to complete the painting in one evening he gave up and returned the unfinished painting to Me. The slow burn that I like to implement as a practice was too slow for him; he wanted more immediate gratification, perhaps something resembling a one-night stand or an appointment with a sex worker. A cheap, quick, and easy thrill. However, he did return the painting to Me politely and efficiently, which was much appreciated. There was integrity there. However, his abandoning of the painting terminated the relationship. Regardless of the unfinished nature of the painting, I must use the work already put in by him; even a failed attempt at servitude is evidence of servitude. My labor cannot go to waste. Perhaps an unfinished kit is even more pathetic than a finished one and I enjoy the idea of profiting from a man’s pathetic failure.

Looking at this unfinished paint-by-numbers kit makes Me think of his sexuality as his painting style: rushed with a small attention span for his Dominatrix’s pleasure and, ultimately, a desire for his own quick, protestant satisfaction.

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Reba Maybury
Private Life
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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 (2013) and has exhibited at venues including LC Queisser, Tbilisi (2025); Company Gallery, New York (2024); Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome (2021); HFKD, Holstebro (2021); Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2020); and LUMA Westbau, Zurich (2019).

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Tally for Mistress Rebecca

1 = 1 hr

Time Spent Painting* Color Sections Completed

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* Must be kept in clarity

To the One and
only
Misses Rebecca
with love +
respect - Lu H

Andre danske Kvinder har tit fortalt mig, at datingapps er fyldt med submissive mænd. Det rejser dette spørgsmål i mig: Ønsker disse mænd at opleve underkastelsen uden egentlig at ønske sig, at en Kvinde er dem overlegen? Er begæret efter underkastelse udelukkende ensidigt?

Dominerende Kvinder er ikke sat i verden for at tjene submissive mænd. Når Mine subs arbejder for Mig, er det en måde, hvorpå de kan tilbyde Mig noget, der faktisk gør Mig mere magtfuld, og ikke kun magtfuld i deres fantasi. Jeg forklarede dette til White Album, og han gik med til at blive brugt til at lave et maleri for Mig.

Da det gik op for ham, at han ikke kunne færdiggøre maleriet på en aften, gav han op og gav Mig det ufærdige maleri tilbage. Den slags langsomme ild, jeg plejer at bruge i min praksis, var for langsom for ham, han ville have omgående tilfredsstillelse, måske noget, der kunne minde om et engangsknald eller et besøg hos en sexarbejder. Billig, hurtig, nem spænding. Dog gav han Mig det ufærdige maleri tilbage i al høflighed og effektivitet, hvilket Jeg satte meget pris på. Der var noget intgritet. Ikke desto mindre sluttede relationen, da han gav op på maleriet. På trods af det ufærdige maleri er Jeg nødt til at høre frugterne af det arbejde, Jeg allerede har lagt i ham, og selv et forfjet underdanighedsforsøg er et bevis på underdanighed. Mit arbejde må ikke gå til spilde. Måske er et ufærdigt prik-til-prik-billede endnu mere sølle end et, der er færdigt, og Jeg kan godt lide idéen om at profitere på en mands patetiske flasko.

Når Jeg kigger på hans ufærdige billede, tænker Jeg på hans seksualitet som hans malestil, forhaster, med meget begrænset opmærksomhed rettet mod sin Dominatrix' nydelse, og i sidste ende blot et begær efter sin egen hurtige, protestantiske tilfredsstillelse.

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Reba Maybury
Private Life
Udstillingsperiode: 30.08.2025 – 26.10.2025

Reba Maybury (f. 1990) er britisk billedkunstner, forfatter og politisk dominatrix bosat i Funder udenfor Silkeborg. Hun er uddannet fra Central Saint Martins i London (2013) og har udstillet på blandt andet LC Quessier, Tbilisi (2023); Company Gallery, New York (2024); Museum of Contemporary Art, Rom (2021); HFKD, Holstebro (2021); Kunsthall Charlottenborg, København (2020) og LUOMA Westbau, Zürich (2019).

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Nogle gange vil mennesker penetrere andre menneskers privatliv. Nogle gange vil mennesker ødelægge andre, og der findes en *infinity pool* af selvhævdelse dér.

Nogle gange ville jeg ønske, jeg var en homoseksuel mand, og nogle gange, hvis ikke for det meste, slipper visse mennesker af sted med ting.

I sig selv kan beviser medføre de mest utrolige, patetiske føljeser, når man kigger på dem.

Rent materielt er beviset ofte en lille, sørgelig ting sammenlignet med selve handlingens massivitet.

Er det en ren handling at betragte nogen uden vedkommendes vidende?

Nogle gange er beviser helt ekstremt gyldige, men straffen eksisterer simpelthen ikke. Mange mennesker slipper af sted med kriminalitet, på trods af den tungeste bevisbyrde. Nogle gange, selv med de mest strukturerede beviser imod sig, kan visse kriminelle blive gjort til helte.

Da jeg spurgte en håndfuld af mine submissive ind til kriminalitet, de har begået, indrømmede de at have kørt for hurtigt, urineret i offentligheden, købt og indtaget ulovlige stoffer, kørt spiritkørsel, taget offentlig transport uden billet, været i slåskamp med andre mænd eller have begået civil uliydighed i forbindelse med demonstrationer. Kriminalitet mod kvinder bliver aldrig nævnt. Betyder det, at kriminalitet mod kvinder ikke findes?

Er kvinderne i Degas' billeder af kvinder, der vasker sig, reelt rigtige kvinder? Er det at kigge på disse kvinder et billigt kick eller snarere et dyrt ét?

Det antages som regel, at en voyeur er en mand. Deraf det populære engelske udtryk "peeping Tom".

Et privatliv, der er vanskeligt at begribe, at få adgang til, inviterer så meget desto mere til at blive penetreret. Begæret efter at vide, hvordan nogen enten overlever eller opfører sig i et privat hjem, i deres eget snavs, bliver så meget desto mere ønskværdigt, jo mere præcis deres offentlige fremtoning er.

Desværre er misogynt ikke-kønnet, misogyntien kan og vil kunne besidde ethvert køns psyk.

Hvordan kan vi definere pornografi? Er det pornografiske altid sensationelt? Og er det, der var spirituel for 150 år siden, stadig spirituel i dag? Er voyeurisme spirituel?

Hvad er beskuerens position? Hvilke stillinger kan han lide, og hvem betragter ham? Stående, siddende, på hug, på alle fire, på knæ, liggende på ryggen eller siden? Frygt er antithesen til eroticisme, at være ægte bange hæmmet orgasmens potentiale til at folde sig ud, og orgasmer er det bedste i verden.

WHITE ALBUM, DANSK, KØBENHAVN, (BUSINESS), DANMARK - UAFÆRDIG, 2024

36 farver, akryl på printet lærred, 50 x 50 cm, ufærdigt

Reba Maybury

Når jeg møder en sub for første gang, stiller jeg ham altid en række spørgsmål for at vurdere hans maskulinitet og submissive natur. Jeg spørger ofte subs om deres kulturelle smag, eftersom det tit tegner et ret afslørende billede af deres værdier og underliggende politiske tilbøjeligheder.

Da jeg spurgte denne sub, hvad hans yndlingsplade var, sagde han, at det var *The White Album* af The Beatles. Det virker bredt vedtaget, at The Beatles er verdens 'bedste' band, og at de derudover kan opfattes som den hvide samtidsmaskulinitets arkitekter. Ikke desto mindre er det et ret besynderligt valg af yndlingsplade for en 25-årig i 2024. De spillede en Nina Simone-sang på den bar, vi mødtes på, og jeg bad ham fortælle mig, hvem det var der sang. Han kendte ikke sangen og vidste heller ikke, hvem Hun var, og virkede ligeglads med sin uvidenhed, hvilket, for Mig, er den største ydmygelse, han kunne have oplevet.

White Album var også forbløffende hvid. Da han kom ind på den bar, hvor jeg selv og Lady Lucille mødte ham første gang, troede jeg, han var en meget ældre mand, måske endda i 60'erne, eftersom hans hår var en ret chokerende nuance af blond. Han klædte sig også som en meget ældre mand. Han havde en hvid skjorte på med et næsten forsvindende blomstermønster på kraven, spidse lædersko og jakkesætbuskser, hvilket fik ham til at fremstå som en mand, der fandtes i en tid, hvor han aldrig behøvede at bevise sin faktiske eksistens, en samtidssafvisende tid, der omfavnede traditioner – og dermed potentielt også ungdommen.

På White Albums fetish-profil havde han posteret en guddommelig, tegneserieagtig tegning af et heteropar, der bliver gift. Kvinden var stor og butter og havde en snor i hånden, der sad fast om den lillebitte, skælvende og nøgne goms kønsorganer, alteret var prydet med et stort Kvindelogo, og en gruppe udelukkende Kvindelige gæster stod i baggrunden. Han sagde, at han ingen interesse havde i et forhold til en Kvinde, hvor han ikke er submissiv, og at han ikke kan have sex på nogen anden måde.

I de snart tre år, jeg har boet i Danmark, er det ikke lykkedes Mig at finde en robust, lokal sub til at tjene Mig. Er det det danske demokratistillingsskævtikker, som giver danske mænd grund nok til at tro, at kampen er over, at Kvinder og mænd virkelig er lige i Danmark, hvilket så betyder, at de ikke fuldt ud kan underkaste sig i en sadomasochistisk dynamik? Betyder det, at de ikke kan tro på, ikke engang i fantasien verden, at en Kvinde kan være dem guddommeligt overlegen? At de ikke engang kan underkaste sig en Kvinde? Betyder det, at danske mænd ikke tror på alle de skrækkelige ting, mænd gør?

Den danske velfærdsstat skaber mange progressive og vidunderlige forudsætninger for, at dens borgere kan leve bedst muligt, men det betyder ikke, at misogyntien bare forsvinder i takt med nye barselsregler eller statistikker om ligestilling på arbejdspladsen. Desværre er misogynti en allestedsnærværende form for vold, der bliver ved med at findes overalt, i vores sind, og som har indflydelse på, hvordan vi opfører os – hvad end vi vil det eller ej. Kun ved at være bevidste om dens allestedsnærværelse kan vi ændre vores egen adfærd.

Tænk blot på det nordiske paradoks: Danmark er et foregangsland på ligestillingsfronten, men har uforholdsmæssigt mange tilfælde af partnervold mod kvinder i forhold til andre europæiske lande.

Og så er der Janteloven, den skandinaviske samfundssatire fra 1933, der udspliller sig i en fiktiv dansk landsby, men hvis observationer stadig resonerer i den her historie set landsbyens indbyggere ned på ambitioner om at være bedst, at tro, man er bedre end andre, er indbegrebet af vulgaritet, man skal hellere dukke hovedet, blive ved med at være et får – passe ind. Konformitet er abenbart godt for samfundets velbefindende. Protestantisme driver afskyen ved dekadence frem. Hvis dette virkelig er en ting i det danske samfund, hvorfor skulle en dansk mand så opfatte et andet menneske, og i dette tilfælde en Dominatrix, som noget exceptionelt, når det er ligestilling, der løber i hans årer?

Konform er det sidste, en Dominatrix er. Selve Hendes væsen går imod normativiteten, og Hun bor i en verden, hvor regler vendes på hovedet. Hendes praksis har rod i omskyrelsen af hierarkier. Hun hylides for sin styrke, stamina og exceptionisme. Og i et land som Danmark, hvor hierarkier 'abenbart' ikke findes, og hvor der ses ned på det exceptionelle, også 'satirisk', er der i Min hidtidige erfaring ikke særlig god grobund for Kvindeligt dominans.

Jeg vil mene, at også den mandlige beskuer indtager en position, der hænger uløseligt sammen med magtdynamikken – gennem selve den handling, som deres eget blik er. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec var en voyeur. Edgar Degas var en voyeur. Dansernes mandlige værge på scenen var en voyeur. Lægen, der undersøgte sexarbejderne, var en voyeur. Kundene var voyeur. Selve maleriet er en voyeur. Museet er voyeur. Dets besøgende er voyeur. Sexarbejde er uadskilleligt fra det mandlige blik. Kvinders kroppe og bevidstheder er uadskillelige fra mandlig voyeurisme. Skandalen omkring Manets *Olympia* i 1865 havde netop rod i en bevidsthed om den voyeuristiske erfaring – ikke rettet mod maleriets overflade, men gennem det; at disse mænd, der stod foran billedet, faktisk allerede havde haft en virkelig oplevelse af kvindens krop. Kønnets funktion differentieres netop via de positioner, som henholdsvis betragteren og den betragtede indtager. Den mandlige beskuer har altid vidst, præcis hvordan han skulle opføre sig i forhold til sit eget bøger. Han har vidst, præcis hvordan man skulle tilpasse sig den hverdagslige, systemiske og politiske repræsentation af kønnet vold, udnyttelsen af kvinders kroppe og pornografien som konsekvens heraf. Det effektive ved at spejlvende denne attitude – i Mayburys arbejde, der vil sige i historiske diskurser og den vestlige indstilling til kunst og sex – er bundet op på metodologier omkring kvinders fortsatte underdanighed. Degas' maleri er, ligesom Toulouse-Lautrecs, uadskilleligt fra denne ideologi.

PRIVATLIV

Reba Maybury

Impressionisten Edgar Degas lavede i slutningen af 1800-tallet en serie pasteller af nøgne kvinder i Paris, der vasker og tørrer sig.

Degas' værker blev både hyldet og kritiseret i deres samtid for de 'kluntede' stillingers originalitet, men også for perspektivet – som om beskueren tårner sig op over kvindene. Lovprisningen skyldes en åbenbart fremsynet opfindsomhed, hvad angår netop perspektiv, der ligner snarere kameraskud end klassisk komponerede figurer. I der poserer i nært afkodede og bevidste portætter. Disse malerier har man derimod en fornemmelse af, at kvindernes kroppe, måden, de er i gang med noget, bliver zoomet ind på uden deres vidende.

Degas malede aldrig de her kvinders ansigter. Hans evner blev besunget. "Kvinder kan aldrig tilgive mig, de hader mig, de følger, jeg afvæbner dem. Jeg viser dem i deres køkkener" – Edgar Degas

Prik-til-prik-malerier er malet, som er lavet til udførelsen af et allerede optegnet billede. De inkluderer som regel pcnsler, små tubet maling med nummerede labels og et lærred med påtrykte kanter og tal. Maleren vælger en farve, der stemmer overens med et af tallene, og maler så med denne farve på et af de markerede områder på lærredet, lidt ligesom i en malebog. Det, at beordre mine submissive mænd til at udføre et prik-til-prik-maleri for mig, er en måde, hvorpå de kan have en oplevelse med kunst uden at være kunstnere, en afslappende aktivitet for voksne, der ikke stiller krav om kreativitet, men bare er afslapning.

Det er ikke langt fra en kunde hos en sexarbejder eller en turist på besøg i en by – deres fritidsagtige forbrugsoplevelser, der ikke tager noget ansvar for lokal kultur, politik eller stedets velbefindende som sådan. Der er bred enighed om, at de kvinder, der poserede for Degas, var sexarbejdere. At vaske sig er et af de usynlige aspekter af sexarbejdernes profession, og det er ofte en kvindes job, uanset hendes profession, at gøre rent efter mænd. Jeg har forsøgt at finde ud af, præcis hvor mange Degas-værker der forestiller kvinder, som vasker sig selv, men det har ikke været muligt at finde et præcist tal, dog er der ingen tvivl om, at det er mange.

Kan det klassificeres som en besættelse? Der er en interagerende uskadethed over disse billeder af kvinders ansigtsløse, nøgne kroppe, som der spioneres på, og det ordnære ved deres mulighed siver nu ind i kunsthistorien. Og jeg tænker, at det er det mest luskede ved overgrebet banalitet.

Hvem betragter betragteren?

RGADEN

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Reba Maybury
Private Life
Udstillingsperiode: 30.08.2025 – 26.10.2025

Det er en stor fornøjelse at introducere denne publikation, der udkommer i forbindelse med Reba Mayburys soloudstilling *Private Life* på O – Overgaden. Over de seneste år har O – Overgaden med genbæret fra Augustinus Fonden produceret en publikationsstrække, der udgives i forbindelse med kunsthallens soloudstillinger. Målsætningen med denne serie er at mangfoldiggøre samtalene under og efter udstillingerne og åbne op for, at nyt materiale kan udspringe heraf.

I dette tilfælde har skribent og kurator Hugo Bausch Belbachir bidraget med et essay om voyeurismens og blikkets ambivalens i forhold til Mayburys praksis – en stor og varm tak for dette bidrag. Derudover har Maybury selv skrevet en tekst om udstillingens to dele og om en af sine forhenværende danske submisisve mænd. Jeg vil gerne takke hele O – Overgadens team for den store indsats i forbindelse med udstillingen, og naturligvis også fanfare, vores grafiske designere, for deres dedikerede arbejde på denne publikation. Sidst, men ikke mindst, en særlig tak til Reba for at dele sit materiale – fra koncept og udvalgte samtaler til tekstmateriale – med os alle sammen, både gennem udstillingen og denne publikation.

I sit kunstneriske virke trækker Reba Maybury på sin position som domatrix under aliaset Mistress Rebecca, idet hun lader sine underkastede mænd – også kaldet *submissives* – udføre instruktionsværker på hendes befaling.

På O – Overgaden præsenterer Maybury en serie malerier fra 2025, som alle er baseret på mal-efter-tal-sæt. Værkerne gengiver den franske impressionist Edgar Degas' serie af pasteltegninger på papir, som afbilder kvinder fra arbejderklassen, ofte læst som sexarbejdere, der vasker sig. De nøgne kvindelige kroppe, hvis 'klodsede positioner' fylder hele billedfladen, er optagede af det ofte usynlige arbejde, som er forbundet med intimitet og sexarbejde: at holde kroppen ren. Degas' komposition er grundlæggende voyeuristisk

– kvindernes observeres bagfra eller med ansigtet vendt væk, som upersonlige, objektiverede kroppe, der ikke ser tilbage. Hvor Degas' berømte værkserie synes at skjule sin iboende mannlige dominans gennem brugen af blødt lys og douce farver, afslører de upolerede, grove gengivelser, skabt af forskellige submissives, en brutal virkelighed bag disse kvindelige motiver.

I udstillingens andet rum udsender duftspredere en forfalsket version af Diors mandeparfume *Savage*, der franske ord for rå, krænkende, vild. Gennem de sidste ti år har duftens reklamansigt været Johnny Depp – skuespilleren, der samtidig har været anklaget for vold i hjemmet af sin ekspartner, Amber Heard, i to højprofilerede retssager. I retten benyttede Depps forvars team den velkendte strategi 'deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender' (DARVO), hvor kritik afværges ved at forbytte rollerne mellem krænker og offer. I 2023 fornyede Johnny Depp sin kontrakt med Dior for 20 millioner dollars, den største sum nogensinde for at promovere en herreparfume.

I den bagerste sal introduceres et element af overvågning: Publikum ser sig selv, mens de ser på de badende kvinder, der observeres og seksualiseres selv midt i et af livets mest banale eller hverdagslige formål. Ved at udlitcere det triviale arbejde, der ligger i selve produktionen af kunstværket, peger Maybury på magtforholdet mellem dominans og underkastelse. Her vender hun rollerne mellem observerer og observeret, eller sager mellem krænker og offer, som er indlejret i både vores kønnede, private liv og vores offentlige, kulturelle institutioner, på hovedet. Hvis domatrixen som sexarbejder typisk bliver set som en underholdende og undertrykt fantasi – lidt som kunstneren ofte gøres til samfundets underholdende 'underdog' – så er det her Mayburys submissives, og i sidste ende også hendes publikum, der sættes i arbejde og observeres, hvilket undergraver og perverterer den stereotyp forstæls af, hvem der egentlig tjener hvem.

Rhea Dall
Leder og chefkurator på O – Overgaden,
september 2025

INTRODUKTION

