

Artspace public body show 'one of the most explicit exhibitions ever seen in Sydney'



Linda Morris



The human body in all its nakedness is a thing of beauty, not shame, and it can be a force for change and good, according to the curators of a new Sydney exhibition.

"We don't want to be provocative for the sake of provocative," Artspace's co-executive director Alexie Glass-Kantor said.



Talia Linz, left, and Alexie Glass-Kantor, co-curators of *The Public Body .02* at ArtSpace, have brought together the work of more than 40 artists. Photo: Dominic Lorrimer

"Some of this material hardly reinvents the wheel. None of it is anything more explicit and complicated than you can see on Tinder."

But, as a note of caution, the Woolloomooloo gallery warns on entry the exhibition contains strong language, nudity and explicit imagery and that all minors should be accompanied by a supervising adult.

The Fairfax critic, John McDonald, has described *The Public Body .02*, running since July 28, [as one of the most explicit exhibitions seen in Sydney](#).

One video work documents a man's first sexual experience while another artist has taken hardcore images of his mother.

Second in a series of three exhibitions running over three years, the show looks at personal representations of the body through the sphere of feminism, queer identity and "anti-racist subjectivities".

In the show, Glass-Kantor and co-curator Talia Linz have brought together the works of more than 40 artists and collectives from 14 countries including works by Leigh Bowery, muse of Andy Warhol, and Australian Indigenous artist Brooke Andrew.

Many of the artists feature their own bodies or that of lovers, families and friends as subject and objects of their work.

There are elderly naked bodies on show. "There are sick bodies, there are dying bodies there's work in the show that deal directly with HIV," Glass-Kantor said. "The artistic intention is key in the censorship debate if we want to go down that route."

Dani Marti's video shows the art collector and patron, Peter Fay, having his first sexual experience as a man in his mid-60s. Their stark encounters were filmed over four months and Fay describes what it is like to have sexual contact for the first time.

"You don't see penetration or anything like that," Linz said. "It's much more about the intimacy and [Fay's] relationship with his own body and there is an accompanying text work and he talks about how he considered his body a brutal failure."

American artist, Leigh Ledare, turns the camera on his mother, a former dancer and model later turned escort.

Regina Jose Galindo, a Guatemalan performance artist who specialises in body art, appears in a video in which she stands naked facing off a bulldozer ripping up the ground around her. The work speaks to the history of government-sanctioned genocide.

"We really wanted to look at the complicated space of the body, not as a space of spectacle or of the Instagrammable selfie but the space of the public body as a political space, the connotation of agency and emancipation," Glass-Kantor said.

"The body is hashtag complicated, we are having troubles dealing with the body now, in all facets of our lives whether it's same-sex marriage through to questioning Obama's legitimacy as the president of the United States of America."

Artspace, which turns 35 next year, was established to support risky and experimental work.

For the three exhibitions, the gallery put together a five-page risk management plan looking at the precedents for censorship and obscenity laws in Australia.

"We decided it was important and legitimate to make an exhibition that dealt with the type of content we are dealing with everyday, whether it's a commercial on Channel Ten or Tinder, and to look at them through the vocabulary of what artists are doing," Glass-Kantor said.

"In some ways it is more difficult for us to show complicated content than the Art Gallery of NSW. The Art Gallery of NSW is protected by the imprimatur of history.

"We sit squarely at the pointy end trying to work out the ideas of our times directly as we are living them through the practices of artists and we wanted to talk about that with this series of exhibitions.

"There will be work that challenges the sensibilities of viewers but we think that's important because you can't affect social change and a society that recognises equality and inclusiveness and respect and empathy if you don't expand the vocabulary for what is accepted."