KETTLE'S YARD

Formae Mutatae

A discussion on image, transformation and myth in Linderism

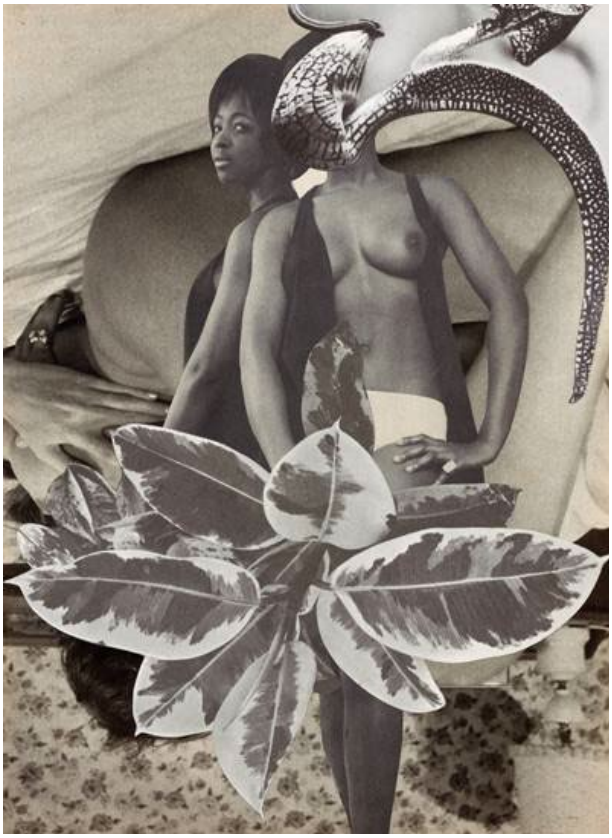
Artist Linder Sterling in conversation about her work with classicist Professor Katherine Harloe and curator Dr Amy Tobin, chaired by Alina Khakoo, PhD student and former curatorial assistant at Kettle's Yard.

Transcript of the event on 2 October 2020, 5.30 pm.

Alina Khakoo: Hi everyone, thank you for joining us this evening. My name is Alina Khakoo, I am a PhD student in the English Faculty at Cambridge, and I was recently a Curatorial Assistant at Kettle's Yard. It's my great pleasure to be chairing this panel 'Formae Mutatae, A discussion on image, transformation and myth in *Linderism*' on the occasion of our exhibition *Linderism* at Kettle's Yard, which is on view until 11 October. Bringing together the great minds of Linder, Dr Amy Tobin and Professor Katherine Harloe, we are going to explore Linder's transformation of mythic and classical references through photomontage. Katherine Harloe is a Classics Professor at the University of Reading. Her research has focused on the transmission of classical mythology in political, cultural and scholarly currents from the 18th century onwards; she is especially well-known for her work on Winckelmann. Amy Tobin is a curator at Kettle's Yard as well as a lecturer in the Department of History of Art, focusing on the histories of feminism and art; she is also the curator of *Linderism*. And Linder, of course, needs no introduction.

We are expecting the event to last about an hour, including 15 minutes for audience questions in the end.

Let us begin with Linder's most recent work for

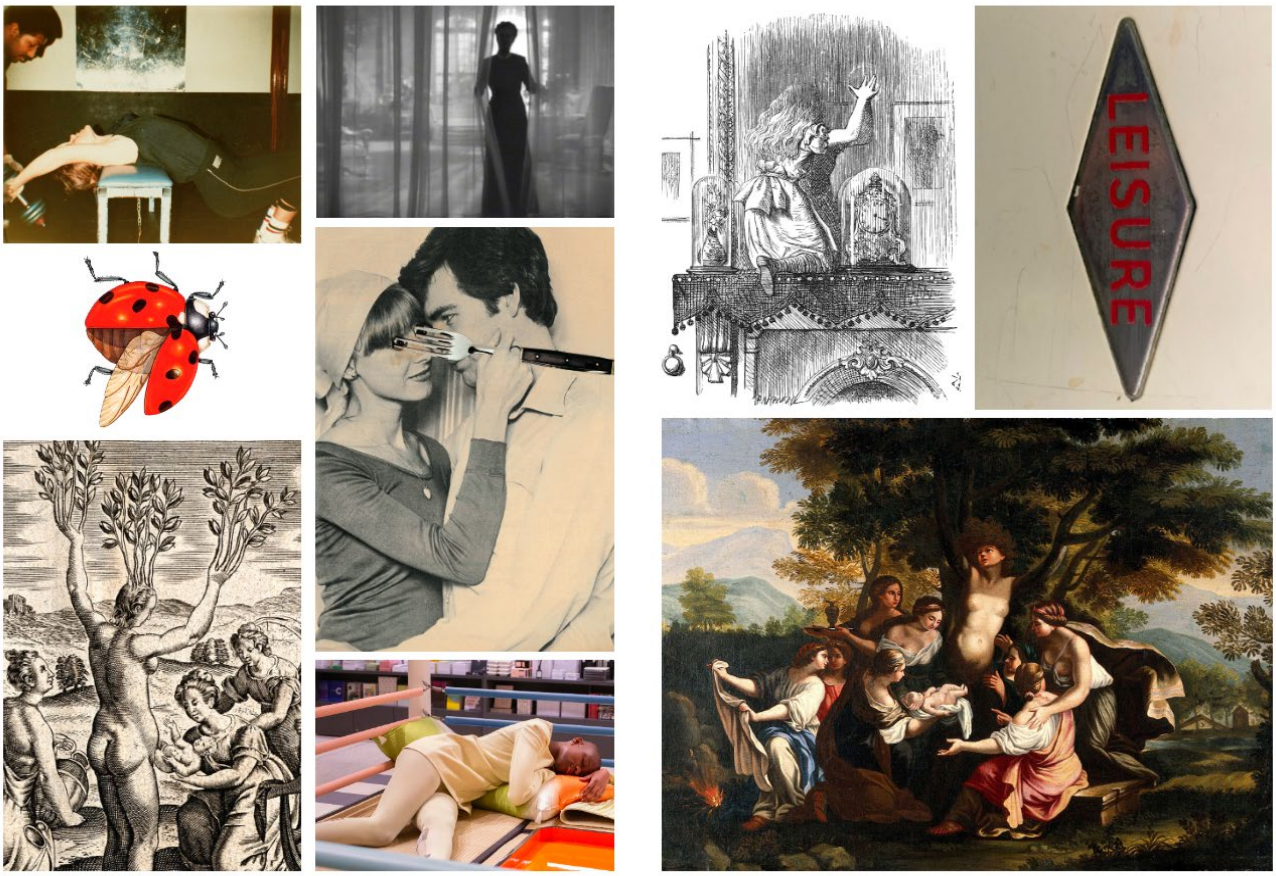


Linder, *Similem tibi*, 2020.

The Botanical Mind at Camden Arts Centre, based around the myth of Myrrha. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Myrrha has a wayward passion for her father, whom, with the help of her nurse, she tricks into having sex with her. She sends herself to exile and she gives birth to Adonis, and meanwhile the gods transform Myrrha into a tree. The tears that she weeps become myrrh, the fragrant resin that is used in incense and various medicines.

Linder has been studying the myth of Myrrha for the past three years. Myrrha was on the mood board for *Linderism* and is featured in the artist's research pages of the *Linderism* book, so I thought we could start by talking a little bit about this in your body of work Linder.

Linder: I think it is a good starting point, because in a way, it is like a baton being handed from Kettle's Yard, in this case going to *Botanical Mind*, and eventually some of these



Linderism, exhibition catalogue page spread, 2020.

threads will carry up to the Hatton Gallery with the retrospective touring there next.

These works have been in my psyche for the past three years. There are very few myths around incest. We know the Oedipus myth all too well. We know about Lot's daughters in the Bible, tricking their father into having sex, but that is purely, heroically, to make sure the human race doesn't die out. So, I was very fascinated by this myth, I think it has been really hidden away, in the crease within mythology for a long time. I know it was the subject of many paintings in the 18th century, but then it disappears, and then I read an essay by a young classicist called Thea Lawrence.

I think one of you has a note with this extraordinary title, can you tell us?

Alina: Yes sure, so Thea Lawrence's essay is titled 'Incense, Perfume, Incest and (Im)pietas: Myrrh, Religion and Gender in the Roman World'.

Linder: So, it's an extraordinary title and as soon as I read it I thought I've never seen those nouns together in a sentence before. I'd never seen incense, incest etc, fused together. A lot of what I do in my work, is that I glue, stick, fuse things together that shouldn't go together. There's a kind of incestuous motif there, things that rub up against each other, that should not rub up against each other, often using found sexual imagery, often within claustrophobic domestic interiors. You could argue that there is a strand, a deep, deep pulse in a lot of this work reflecting in part my childhood experience, of this myth of incest.

In the myth, Myrrha is exhausted, she's been impregnated by her father, and she's running away from him and her father is running after her all around the world, and Myrrha is praying to the gods for some kind of respite, and she's transformed into a tree. And then

the tears that she weeps are what we know as myrrh, the precious resin used in incense and also as a general panacea. One of the Three Wise Men presents myrrh to the baby Jesus. I was thinking of the permutations of this myth, for instance at Christmas, when the shops suddenly fill with references to gold, frankincense and myrrh.

It's a very peculiar myth and now I'm as curious about Ovid's retelling of it, ventriloquising through Orpheus. There's a lot there, it's one small story, for me it feels like a biopsy of something that's happening in this room anyway (Gallery 2 of Kettle's Yard), which I want to explore further.

Katherine Harloe: So when Linder wrote to me to ask me about Myrrha, after she heard me talking about Ovid on the radio, she said she'd been struggling with it, and trying to find ways to present it, and struggling with this wayward desire of a girl. Another thing that came through strongly for me in Linder's retelling was the idea of space. Myrrha goes from the palace of her father's house, and then goes right throughout the world. And that idea of exile and finding a place where you are cast out of society and must go through worlds. I think that's where the metamorphosis in this myth is so powerful, it takes Myrrha to an in-between place. It strikes me that a lot of your photomontages are also putting people in between places or bringing things that are incongruous together. That seems really to chime with what is going on in her myth.

Linder: Yes, I think I am trying to depict all those liminal, psychological places too. For instance, placing the language of pornography, against these very banal, domestic, claustrophobic interiors and trying to see what myths are playing out there. I read about Jung asking himself at midlife 'what myth am I living by?' And I would like to think about myth within contemporary print media – which myths are we being sold every day? Whether it's a hair straightener or a lipstick or a new car, which myths have we been continuously fed, and which myths do we subscribe to, consciously or unconsciously?

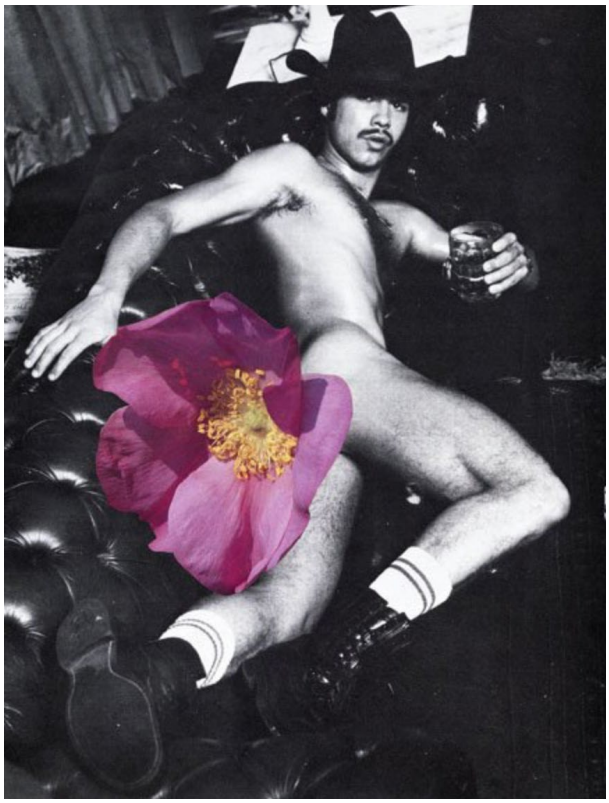
Alina: I wonder if we can talk a little bit more about one of those main myths that you confront, the myth of heteronormativity. Obviously Myrrha's story is one about wayward sexuality, and she has close links with Phaedra who has this passion for her stepson Hippolytus and also Oedipus, Marina Warner has put them into a kind of productive disjunction. So, could we use this as an entry point into talking about queerness in Linder's works.

Amy Tobin: Perhaps this comes down to the difference between what Linder was doing in her photomontages in the 1970s and those made later from 2006, after a substantial break in the intervening years. We emphasised that break in the exhibition and for good reason. Primarily, I wanted to gesture to these different ideas of sexuality, as restraint, and needing to intervene into a print culture and a visual culture that wants to map a certain kind of femininity onto women, and your more recent body of work, or bodies of work I should say, from 2006 onward where things become

Linder, *She Warned You Adonis,* 2020.

much looser, much more fluid. That's not, I don't think, a response to any political gains, although maybe we can make that argument, but really it's more about the way that your work has changed, or the way maybe you are interested in the power of creating new images that destabilise the normative ideas of sexuality and interconnection, and relationality. Particularly, the thing that really struck me when we were hanging the show, was how bodies are merging with flowers, different kinds of species, other bodies, and the way that sometimes, flowers, or shells, or animals connect people to create these hybrid bodies. So, I think that's a really interesting change in your work, in your photomontages, and it's really interesting in relation to Ovid and those themes that you've been interested in for a long time.

Katherine: It feels as if the metamorphosis here, in the later work, in a way is more Ovidian; we have the flowers, we have the trees, we have things that seem to be fluid even when perhaps they are not, like the shells, and that lustre, that



Linder, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero IV*, 2012.

glamour is still there, whereas in some of your earlier work I really get the humour, but also – you know, the cakes, and the iron. It feels like there is a kind of politics, obviously, but there's more mystery, maybe a different set of messages, or a different set of points in the later works. I don't know if it feels like that to you?

Linder: Very much so, I think that's the joy and privilege of having a retrospective because I can look at works from 1976 onwards, and through the process of curation, realise that we could have told ten different narratives.

So, we were so conscious of that – of which narratives to take, which key works to include? And of course, I became acutely aware of the shift in photomontage, although I still use the same tools, still work as low tech as can be, still use a Swan and Morton surgeon's scalpel with a number 11 blade. I'm still working with piles of print media from 1910 onwards. We've used the word glamour, the idea of so-called glamour photography, and most pornography, and even a lot of fashion imagery, is so fragile, and it doesn't take much to skew it, to hijack it. If there is a myth about heterosexual sexuality, it doesn't take much to really make it look like a car crash has happened, or that it's been taken on a very different scenic route.

Amy: It's also interesting because seeing these works, these newer works from 2006 and onwards, you can look back at those earlier works that are made in the crucible of punk, revisiting Dada and feminism, and see that humour more in evidence. Or you can read it in a different way because of the ways your work has changed and taken on a different aspect. I hope that's what you get in the exhibition as well, if you are able to move between the rooms and the separation.

Linder: Yes. But I think that humour and wit, I think generationally, it was really very important. We were all deadly serious, but then wit was another weapon that we could use to deflate all kinds of ideas about consumerism, about sexuality, about politics. I still use that, for instance, I may find an extraordinary pornographic image, then I'll place a cream

cake onto it. It's such simple engineering. It's not like the work of the monteur, the engineer, is that complex, although there is a knack to it. We now know that people are paid vast fortunes to engineer our attention online so that act of engineering now is almost invisible. You could say that at its most potent, people are paid a lot of money to engineer our nervous systems: the more 'likes' we get, the more the reward centres in our brains light up. My engineering is far simpler. It is the beauty of the blade, with one cut or more, and the economy of that. What's the least that I can do to an image, to completely destroy its meaning?

Katherine: I was really struck when we were talking earlier in the afternoon and you described yourself almost as a sound engineer – you said, 'I will dial up the eroticism to the point that it becomes discordant, or dial down this'. And you also described yourself as 'exposing the construction'. And that is quite Ovidian as well, it's what he does with the different narrative voices, and the tricksiness of his poetry. And indeed, with the layering Alina talked about: Ovid's Myrrha is in one way a retelling of Phaedra and Hippolytus, and Phaedra's nurse who helps her. Or the incest of the Oedipus story. But as a kind of indirection. You're never quite sure what the message is. Or his telling allows for discordant, different readings. Maybe that's a way of doing serious humour, at least raising a set of questions or drawing attention to difficult themes.

Linder: To extend the metaphor of the sound engineer, it's a remix. There is this basic palette of myth, and therefore to keep the audience entertained we have to remix it in many ways, using different voices and mouthpieces, I like the idea that there's only a certain amount of myths to go round, we have to keep retelling them, recognising them again and again, and not be too bewitched and hypnotised by them.

Amy: Some of your works are like translations, not translations of visual representations of myth necessarily, but actually of discourse or tradition, which is interesting because when you read into them, thinking of them with a myth in mind, with Ovid in mind, you can go

Still from *The Ultimate Form*, Musèe d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2013.

in all of these different directions, which is exciting.

Linder: But it is all contained in the printed page. The sleek world presented via advertising and media is so visual, and the visual is prioritised at the expense of other senses and the messiness of our bodies. Myth has this messiness but it's less visible.

Alina: We are talking about kinaesthesia, which moves us nicely onto talking about the importance of smell in the myth of Myrrha. So Linder, for anyone who doesn't know, has worked with incense burning before, at Chatsworth, with the help of Thea Lawrence, who you mentioned earlier, but also the classicist Mark Bradley. At Kettle's Yard you reincarnated Jim Ede's pot pourri recipe and I wanted to know if you were drawn to the olfactory element of Myrrha's story which ends with her losing her own senses, but she awakens the senses of those who use myrrh, for example by burning it as incense.

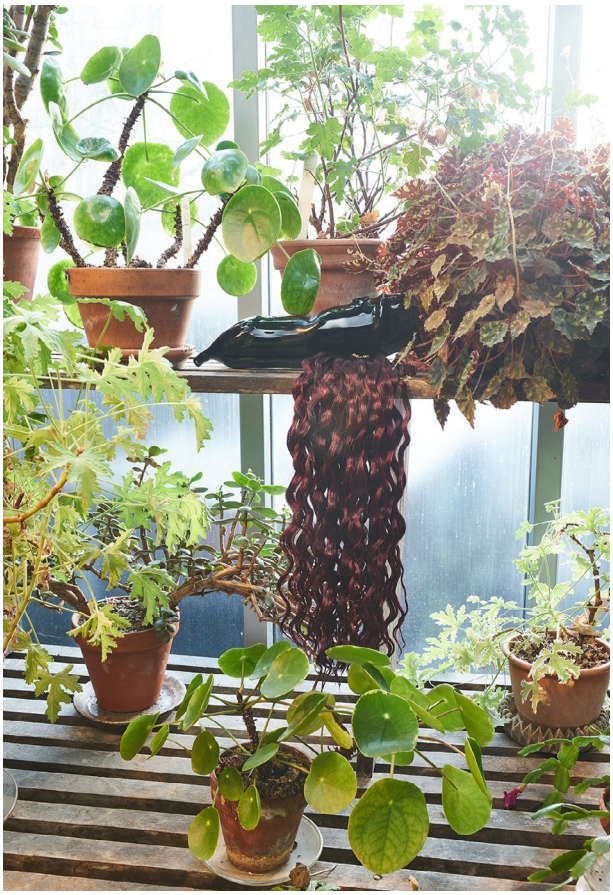
Linder: An economic answer to your question would be: I love to visit galleries, I love to visit museums, but I'm aware all the time that my eye is being courted, it's all working on my eye,

occasionally you have audio-visual work, but sometimes these spaces seem so sterile. I depend a lot on the olfactory system, I love perfumes, and I love working with different blends. For me, whether it's pot pourri, or perfume, a scent is a form of collage, I know that if I add a certain note everything changes, the same vocabulary of notes and chords is used in music.

I am obsessed with the olfactory and how one can engineer an olfactory montage. At Kettle's Yard, we found a letter, where somebody says to Jim 'could you give me the recipe for your pot pourri' and Jim's almost like 'oh, it's not a recipe', but actually it is, he then lists about twenty different ingredients. So, we know that Jim Ede was very concerned about the House being a fragrant space that you walked through. Likewise, at Chatsworth, I once asked the Duke of Devonshire –because the house always smells so beautiful– 'how many sticks of incense do you burn each day?' and he nonchalantly said 'oh, twenty to thirty all at once', but that's why I loved Chatsworth, because you could walk through the house and grounds and experience a fragrant sensorium.

Amy: We have got the images of the House, of course we can't represent the smell. But perhaps we could talk about the lampwork glass pieces you made for the exhibition and the House with Jochen Holz, because we originally discussed them as vessels for scent, and for alchemy.

Linder: It's a totally new medium, I've never worked in glass before. Jochen's process is lampwork, which goes right back to the early years of glass making – it's very alchemical, and we worked together on a series of post-tumescent forms, or maybe pre-tumescent. Katherine, you were saying to me, sometimes in the photomontage there is a sense of time,



Installation views of *Linderism* at Kettle's Yard. Left: *St Encumber* and *St Liberada* from *The Lives of Women Dreaming*, both 2004 in Helen's bedroom, and *Hel Liberada*, 2020 in the extension. Photo credit: Matthew Booth.

Linder, *Myrrha Mutata*, 2020.

something about to happen, or perhaps something has just happened. The glass is like that too, because it is both liquid and fluid, and suddenly this beautiful, delicious, glossy, very fragile substance is frozen in time.

Two of the glass pieces at Kettle's Yard have fake hair spilling out of them, and this is a response to research by Marina Warner into the history of bearded female saints. Again, there is an incest DNA at the tap root of this mythology. There are fairy tales of the mother of a princess passing away, and the king promising his dying wife he would never marry another woman unless she is as beautiful as she. Then the daughter grows up, she is as beautiful as her mother, the king wants to marry her, the princess prays to god and then wakes up covered in hair, then like Myrrha, she has to try to run and escape. So there's a lot to do with this theme in my work, as seen in the hairy shoes in Helen's bedroom. As women now, and men too, we are encouraged to remove almost all body hair, except on our head, where we can have as many hair extensions as we want. So in this moment of obsessive hair removal, placing hair extensions against objects of high femininity heightens the strangeness of our relationships to our bodies. The fake hair extensions combined with the peculiar glossy black glass shapes in the new works really stop me in my tracks, especially as they appear here at Kettle's Yard, nestled nonchalantly among the foliage.

Amy: We also talked about them as vessels, imagining how oils could pass through them and seep into the hair and then the atmosphere. The pastel-coloured glass works evoke this too. They will be hanging at the Hatton Gallery so the relationship will change.

Linder: The idea that the container was leaky, like the female body can be leaky, was important. We are often encouraged to dread the stain, there is a horror of the stain and leaking, whether it's menstrual blood or breast milk, it's all to do with sealing off all those orifices. And again, in mythology, this comes up time and time again, with the female vessel.

Katherine: It comes up in the myth of Myrrha. She was still pregnant when she's turned into a tree, and then has to be delivered of her baby. That monstrous metamorphosis is part of the portent. And in some of the study pictures you were looking at –that aspect very much comes to the fore– the childbirth scenes, with figures who might be her childbirth attendants pointing to the baby, pointing to her. There is something quite shocking about that, actually.

Amy: Because it's not really a process that's often depicted, childbirth…

Linder: …from a tree, that's a little bit niche!

Amy: Some of the images [see p.2] we are showing are page spreads from the *Linderism* catalogue. The spreads from the first section of the book were, in part, based on the mood boards and sketchbooks Linder made before the show. The presence of Myrrha demonstrates how important the myth was for

this exhibition, but read in conjunction with many other things. Often motifs of women disappearing or transforming mythically or supernaturally, which are analogies for the intense visuality – and absence of visuality – feminine bodies are subject to.

Katherine: And yet at the same time it goes back to the queer body, her body in metamorphosis is described as taking on strength, length, firmness. She sinks down into this loss of senses, she embraces it, but there's also positivity and an energy to the way in which this transformation is described using words which are perhaps thought of as more masculine 'robur', ('wood') which can be used ... as you might talk about a man's erection being woody or something like that, it's very much there.

Linder, you then put the most delicate flower or rose on the most masculine of bodies, and you really alter the relationship between bodies in some of these sex scenes as well. What you do is really striking.

Alina: Yes, I've got the quote actually from Ovid where she metamorphoses into the tree. Myrrha asks the Gods to 'change me' because she's exiled herself after this act, and then Ovid narrates: 'slowly soil covers her shins, roots break from her toes, her bones harden, blood becomes sap, arms become branches and her skin becomes solid bark'.

I was thinking when you put up the picture of the image of the hair in among the House [see p.6], that also in the artist's research pages you include lots of images of Jim Ede's shells, and actually in Kettle's Yard there's this real post-human element, that it would be great actually for you to talk about, because I think that just totally brings it to life.

Amy: The Edes' way of putting shells, feathers, branches, found and decorative objects among artworks to create mise-en-scène, is a really important aspect of Kettle's Yard. This also reminds me of recent theories of the post-human or queer theory, which help to rethink the relationship between art and non-art, the

Still from *The Bower of Bliss,* 2017, commissioned by Glasgow Women's Library.

normative and the non-normative, but also the human and animal, even the mammal and the crustacean. We can, perhaps, begin to see difference as relative, rather than divisive. Like in Linder's photomontages, at Kettle's Yard, things interrelate, transforming each other, resisting each other. Bringing Linder's works to Kettle's Yard has made this much more apparent.

Linder: But in every institution, there is that rethinking isn't there? When you look at Chatsworth House or Kettle's Yard, it really helps the artist, the visitor and the curatorial staff to look at these institutions with very fresh eyes. This process is so invigorating and I've enjoyed it, asking all of you about queering what's in the archive. What's in Jim Ede's letters. And then at the same time saying where's Helen Ede in all of this? And trying to build a myth around Helen, and owning that projection because you don't have much to go on. But what if Helen was far more present, what if we could smell her fragrance? What if she did have these beautiful satin gloves in her bedroom and blonde hair snaked out of them?

I wanted to try to flesh Helen out, whilst also acknowledging her ghostliness.

Something similar happened with the female lineage at Chatsworth, time there is measured in Dukes. For instance, if you ask a curator when a certain object was made, the response

could be that it was during the time of the eighth Duke, or a different object may have been made in the time of the eleventh Duke. I was curious to think how could you do an equivalent female line. Likewise, I was interested in how time was represented at Kettle's Yard. I am obsessed with time, as you can probably tell!

Amy: I remember one of the first conversations we had about the exhibition concerned Kettle's Yard's history in relation to the history of British art. This becomes more important when we agreed to tour the exhibition to the Hatton Gallery in Newcastle. If Kettle's Yard is thought of as the home of British modernism, then the Hatton is very much associated with British pop art. So we were thinking of the spaces existing in parallel and parallel rather than sequential histories.

This wasn't too much of a leap because the Edes moved to Kettle's Yard in 1956, the same year as the landmark pop art exhibition *This is Tomorrow*. Richard Hamilton – who taught at Newcastle University – made one of the most iconic photomontages for the exhibition poster, this, in turn, influenced Linder when she was making her earliest photomontages in 1976–7. And yet despite the parallel, there is almost no trace of pop, or consumer culture, at Kettle's Yard, except for a little badge reading 'leisure' in the old kitchen, which is not open to the public.

Linder: Which is in the kitchen, which is so exciting…

Before we leave Myrrha, you know she gives birth to the most beautiful man in the world [Adonis]? And her tears become the most fragrant incense, also myrrh is a panacea, and we now know from contemporary analysis that the essential oil is anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory, it's interesting given the times that we find ourselves in. It's a good fragrance to inhale, to burn, to bathe in. It's important to recognise both the biochemical properties of the resin and the spiritual properties of the incense. Jesus was offered a mixture of myrrh and wine on the cross as a painkiller. We can follow both the botanical roots of myrrh as well as the mythological.

Katherine: It makes it sound homeopathic because it's tears … it's tears that heal tears and that's a powerful magical motif. What wounds us is also the cure.

Alina: Another thing on Myrrha that I think we could talk about is to just explain how you two first made contact. So Linder you first heard Katherine speaking on *Word of Mouth* on Radio 4, on a programme about otherness, and it was when you were, in your research of Myrrha, coming across very different racialised representations of her. Katherine, you were talking about the whitewashing of classical mythology and subsequent representations, and you describe that Ovid does not describe the colour of Myrrha's skin or the colour of her metamorphosis, but he locates her in

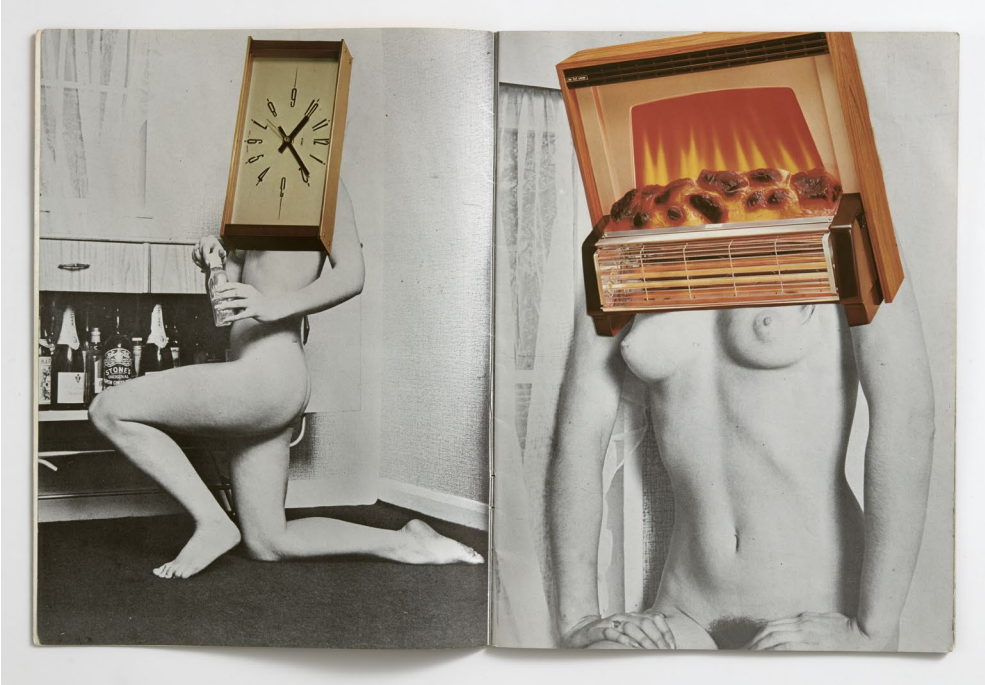
Linder, *Untitled*, 1976/7, Tate.

Panchaia which is an island of spices in the East. And, actually, as a digression that reminds me of when you mentioned Jim Ede's pot pourri recipe, that's equally, bizarrely, vaguely Orientalist in that he says that it's made with spices that travellers brought from the East.

Katherine: It comes out strongly in Thea's paper, the idea of myrrh associated with the East, as being associated with effeminacy, with decadence, being a kind of dangerous substance. And what was really striking, what you pointed out Linder, was that in some of the pictures where she is depicted with dark skin there are also a lot of people pointing at her as well.

Partly I guess because her metamorphosis and subsequent childbirth is a portent, it's a strange thing to happen. She might be tree bark coloured as well. There was something that spoke to me about this idea of Black bodies or people who were racialised as non-white being put on display and being exhibited. That kind of visibility, which is a kind of objectifying visibility, there are lots of different things going on in the Myrrha myth, because on the one hand she asked for it, she asked for the metamorphosis, and she gains relief because there's no place for her to be otherwise, and yet at the same time she's very much objectified, at least in these pictures, and that reads in a very difficult way I think, with some of these representations with dark skin. I found it very interesting that you do work with images and with models who have different racial characteristics, different skin colour, different hair texture, but you said that you find yourself sometimes working with these images in different ways.

Linder: Yes, I've found that often the work I make is viewed and perceived by others as being quite violent. I don't see it at first, but I try and make that empathetic leap and think, actually, some works could be seen as being violent in some ways. There's so much going on in the works about women being gagged or silenced in some way, and bodies being restrained. I recently inherited my late uncle's collection of *Playboy* magazines from 1963 to 1967, and for the Myrrha's series, I really wanted to experiment with skin colour to see what happens if I'm telling this myth, almost through skin tone. Does it shift, does the reading shift? As an artist, why do I feel more comfortable putting this motif, say, onto a photograph of a white European woman, why do I feel some anxiety about the same motif upon a woman of colour. I noticed that



Linder, *Pretty Girl*, 1976–7.

something was shifting between the same acts of juxtaposition in the Myrrha series. Likewise using male pornography, which is usually gay pornography, i.e. if I put a huge cherry tart between a woman's legs it has one meaning, but if I put a huge cherry tart between the man's legs, often it reads as castration, it instantly reads very differently. So the imagery I use, of a rose or a cream cake, is not universal in its meaning. This palette, whether it's a sports car, or a rose, or some kind of food, or whatever, suggests a kind of democracy i.e. they are all cut-outs from popular media, that can be applied equally to different depictions of sexuality and race, but they're not equal – it's not that easy.

With the Myrrha series, I wanted to explore the discomfort of not knowing how it would work if I placed motifs on top of bodies, that weren't from a white European tradition of illustration, I wanted to see how those readings spin off and multiply. Even if I can't describe those differences yet I know that they are there. I knew it was important to contact you [Katherine], because I was going through a period of frustration in the studio, I walked out in a vile mood one day and slammed the door, thinking 'I can't do this series' even though so much of my work refers to incest for all sorts of reasons. Going straight for the bullseye by looking at the myth of Myrrha, made depicting this myth so difficult, and I just couldn't do it. I got in the car, turned on the radio just as your programme began, and it was almost as if the gods were talking to me as the disembodied voice that was you, delivering necessary information to me, it was just the most perfect timing.

Katherine: And so we end up here.

Amy: I think it's also worth noting both the work the photomontage can do through juxtaposition, but also its limits, or the limitations of the materials you are using. The source material is produced within a certain set of references and particular cultural moments, social situations and even when you are using amateur pornography, for instance, which may be more idiosyncratic and perverse,

Linder, *Untitled*, 2009.

or something like *Playboy,* they're still operating within a set of codes. So the degree of intervention, or reinvention, is so variable, maybe sometimes even impossible.

Linder: Yes, the *Playboys* from my late uncle are a typical example.

I'd been going through all these *Playboys* and occasionally finding images - never centrefolds, of models of colour, accompanied by very particular descriptions, she's *never* the girl next door, she's always exotic, always sultry, there's a whole other language used to describe her erotic allure, which does not come into the other myth of the White girl next door, who suddenly finds herself naked, with us as her voyeurs.

I do get lost in the material I'm working with sometimes. I enter into a state of hypnosis and I think what is happening here? How are these images being engineered? And how can I counter that engineering. I think you, Katherine, had the idea of the vivisection

and dissection and the operating theatre, the theatrics of discovering the workings of human anatomy. And it's no accident I use a surgeon's scalpel rather than a craft knife, it's for the precision.

Amy: One thing that's maybe interesting on that note, the way that you sometimes use page spreads, or you use the actual magazine, and you keep it intact. And then sometimes you make a work like *Daughter of the Water* [see p.13], where you take out background image, you take the figures out and you put them in a new scene, create a new kind of space or horizon. I mean that's something that you don't do that regularly, and I just wondered, is that sometimes a way to disconnect protagonists from their original contexts?

Linder: Like transplants, I know that all the metaphors I'm using today are to do with cadavers and surgeries. But what happens if I take a figure and put it, in this case, against a calendar, and put it against a Dali painting, then add in a castle situated within a reflected landscape?

Part of it is the curiosity of seeing what happens through these juxtapositions, and by colliding all these myths. Rather like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, I am cutting out these bodies of imagery and trying to slide them together, and reconfigure them. Even I'm not quite sure of the new narratives or new myths that emerge, but it's quite visceral, when I get that sense of 'Oh, something really exciting has just happened here'.

It's rarely a detached intellectual process, it is quite playful, ludic, (Ludus!), it's pleasurable and there's a very visceral sense of 'Oh my God, that rose has just landed on that part of the anatomy', I almost daren't breathe because suddenly it's ignited, the image is ignited, something's happened.

Alina: We talked about photomontage, but the curation, as you touched on a little bit earlier, was quite self-consciously metamorphic, and also on the screen, there's the *Bower of Bliss* mural, that was commissioned by Art on the Underground.

Katherine: When we were looking at the mural, which is on the stairs [in Kettle's Yard], I said –and it goes back to what we were just talking about, foreground and background –it really messed with my sense of scale, with what was

Linder, photomontages for *Bower of Bliss* mural, commissioned by Art on the Underground, Transport of London, 2018.

Linder, *Daughter of the Water,* 2017.

foreground, what was background, what was living, what not. There's colour, and there's fullness, in a lot of your recent work, but there's also that play of not quite knowing – no not at all knowing, what is going on in terms of foreground and depth, or quite what one's seeing.

Amy: One of the things that we decided with the exhibition, and was very much a collaboration with Linder, was to create these different spaces. So, the first gallery is like hell, like the underworld, when everything's chaotic and punky, and one thing. Then this gallery, Gallery Two, is called 'Paradise Experiments', it is not quite heaven, or a particular heaven, but a kind of paradise…

Linder: ... or trying to get to heaven.

Katherine: It sounds quite Dante-esque.

Amy: Yes, Dante was exactly the reference. We hung the gallery as if you were taking a journey around the space, or following a procession. In Gallery Two things purposeful become more complex, temporal registers shift, morals and codes collide, in contrast to the more interventionist work in Gallery One, which is perhaps a little tougher. Then you were supposed to continue your journey up the stairs and completely lose yourself in this disorientating mural, which comes from Linder's recent experiments creating bowers of bliss.

And then you see the performances, where things expand again – the room is called 'Expanded Collage', which is a phrase Linder used to describe the ways she puts her performances together. Finally the exhibition ends with the *Bower of Bliss* film made at Chatsworth House, and commissioned by Glasgow Women's Library. We hoped there might be the sensation of getting lost in your own wonderland.

Linder: Linderland and wonderland.

Katherine: Can you say a bit more about bowers of bliss? Plural.

Linder: I think that right now, especially right now, but even before the last six months, I was interested in the idea of a safe place for all of us regardless of skin tone and sexuality. It is not only that we should be entitled to safe places, but they should be highly pleasurable spaces. We have to demand not just safety, but aim for even more than that, move beyond survival to thriving, and now because of the pandemic even more so. If you're in isolation, how can you create a bower of bliss?

You can trace the etymology of that phrase right back to Edmund Spencer's *Fearie Queen*, where it is used to describe the home of the character Acrasia as an abode of female desire that gets unmanageable.

Amy: I think one of the things about Linder's work is if you speak to anyone who's been in the audience, or collaborating with Linder on one of her performances, they're filled with such jubilation because one thing that she's been able to do in these works, these large expanded collages, is to create an immense feeling of pleasure and safety.

And I think that's what's also going on in these photomontages, and in the videos, and various

other things that you've done that come under this idea of the bower of bliss. I thought it was really important that we include the mural in the exhibition, because it brings together many of the complications of Linder's work, like the watches and time pieces, that were all things that were lost on the tube, that you discovered, relate those complex relationships to time and history.

Linder: Because the commission did come from Art on the Underground, and as we know, on every train system or bus or public transport system, time is a kind of god. Everything is to do with time.

Whether it's in Chatsworth, where there is one person who comes in just to wind all the many clocks once a week. Or on the Underground, where there's a master of the clocks, there's a lot to do with time in my work.

I study time within Indian music and the keeping of time is, for me, very challenging and exciting. I think I have an obsession with time and how it's represented, and the slippage of time.

Amy: And how slippery time is in your work as well, because as we're having this conversation about myth and classical traditions and classical resonances, we're also thinking about your own life, what you were doing in 2006 and 1976, but also the print material you use comes from all different moments and times.

And then there's other things, if people visited Kettle's Yard they'll have seen the custard section which also relates to this self-portrait, *Glorification de l'Elue*, where, people may not know but you're actually covered in custard and food colouring.

Linder: Yeah, rice pudding, yogurt, cream, honey. Sweet, fatty foodstuffs.

Amy: Sweet things, but everyone thinks it's Photoshopped.

Linder: It's so low tech.

Linder, *Glorification de l'Elue*, 2011.

Amy: It's the same process on parts of the mural. You're able to transform the materials, to create something that seems completely monstrous and seductive at the same time.

Linder: The monstrous is often pointed at (in seventeenth century depictions of Myrrha giving birth, the surrounding Naiads point at her vagina) [see p.15]. If you go back to the billboards at Southwark there are eighty-five meters of imagery that surround the station. So again, you can process and promenade around the station and these peculiar narratives happen, they are slipping and slippery. So many of the images are very low tech, I rarely use Photoshop, I keep things very simple.

Alina: We have a question, and we have a few minutes left, so maybe we can end with this. So, it's to Linder: 'your work seems to consciously reveal foreground images that are usually hidden in magazines for individual consumption, but also, you seem to then camouflage them. Does that make sense? You

distract the viewer but then your camouflage is always worth looking at. Can you please comment on this?'

Linder: I use a lot of decoys, I throw them up all the time. I think a lot of people, especially in 1976 and 1977, always presumed that I was a man, they were always shocked to discover that I didn't have a penis. They were always shocked that those images were made by a woman, and I think that happens even now. With the use of the pornographic image especially, it can act like a flypaper so that some people get stuck on the surface of an image. But other people realise that there's a lot going on *beneath* the surface. So there's the flypaper of pornography, there's a seduction, there's glamour, but there's all sorts of other things pressing against the engineering, nudging at it. Maybe it's that incest motif again, of things that shouldn't go together? It fragments and dislocates our reading.

I'm not particularly answering that question. If anybody else would like to chime in please do.

Amy: I think camouflage is an interesting visual phenomenon, and one that a lot of visual art speaks to. It's also an interesting choice of words because it's also a natural phenomenon, lizards camouflage themselves, and fish. So it feels like an art of the natural world, doesn't it?

Katherine: It's strange, I don't read these images as camouflage. Concealment is sometimes going on. There's your work on masks, and then these roses laid across the face… Sometimes

Marcantonia Francheschini, *The Birth of Adonis*, 1692–1709.

there's concealment and sometimes it seems very revealing. That's what I took from that comment, that there's a bringing out of what is concealed. But actually it's not straightforward, what is being concealed and what is being revealed in what.

Linder: Yes as we said earlier, that was a good distinction to make.

Alina: I think it's also interesting what you say about what viewers bring to your images because you've spoken a little bit about how viewers always want to be fooled by your images. They want to think about them as

Linder, *The Goddess Who Has Five Faces*; *The Goddess Who Prevents Old Age and Death*; *The Goddess Who Prevents Old Age and Death*; *The Goddess Who Is a Continuous Shower of Light*; *The Goddess Who Cures Pain Caused by Arrows*, all 2019.

airbrushed, that looking around the side to try and see…

Linder: … where's the glue.

Alina: Exactly.

Amy: It goes to the foreground and background thing again, doesn't it? Almost disbelief that this is an actual photomontage.

Linder: The dying art.

Amy: That's a compelling thing about that question, that points to that strangeness of camouflage.

Linder: It's almost an eccentric act, I think, now using scissors, paper and glue. And people are amazed that I don't use Photoshop because they say it's so easy, and I say but I don't want it to be easy, that's the whole point. There is a struggle, a search, looking through three boxes of *Playboys* from 1968 and going through every single page and then going through twenty books on cake making to find that one cake that can articulate, on my behalf, trauma, delight, suspense and anticipation. I like the struggle. It's an impossible jigsaw puzzle that I've been given and it's the myth for my sins. I'm always trying to make the jigsaw puzzle fit.
Alina: And also what Amy was saying about yourself, the process of throwing yourself into chronological disarray by combing through these different editions from all these different time periods. That would be lost as well.

Does anyone else want to add anything?

Linder: Well, thank you all.

(Everyone says thank you).

This event was organised and transcribed by Dr Jennifer Powell, Tom Noblett and Daniela Riva Rossi.

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Installation view of *Linderism* at Kettle's Yard, 2020. Photo credit: Matthew Booth.