

Bridget Moser, My Crops are Dying but My Body Persists

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Bridget Moser: *My Crops are Dying but My Body Persists*

Tak Pham

**REMAI MODERN
SASKATOON
MARCH 17 –
OCTOBER 12, 2020**

- Wash hands and face.
- Dry with a clean towel.
- Squeeze a pea-sized amount of product into palms.
- Warm the product for a few seconds between palms or fingers, before gently applying to cheeks in circular motions.
- Gently apply to forehead and rest of face.
- Apply on the neck with upward strokes.
- Use the product twice a day or as needed.

The instructions above might not be foreign to most contemporary eyes. We see them everywhere: on packages of skincare products, in our drug cabinets, on our sinks, in our tubs, or on shelves at drug stores, health shops and spas. There is an old saying, “you are what you eat,” but for our today society, the following update might be more apt, “you are how you desire.”

Toronto-based artist Bridget Moser explores this relationship between our body and our design-for-desire in a dream-like performance for camera, which is the main feature in the exhibition *My Crops Are Dying but My Body Persists* at Remai Modern in Saskatoon. In the artist’s first solo museum exhibition in Canada, visitors watch Moser for 21:57 minutes as she interacts with a selection of objects while contemplating topics of futility and failure, of confusion and loneliness.

Installed at the end of a custom-built ramp, positioned in the middle of the gallery, the video opens with the camera panning over a melange of pink earplugs and acrylic nails scattered on a pink-carpeted floor. As a monophonic sound resembling meditation music is fading in, two hands appear holding a plastic mouth. The hands open and close the mouth, lip-syncing it to a robotic voice-over that confesses a desire to get intimate with furniture whenever the narrator gets lonely.

Right in the opening, Moser sets a surrealist tone for what is to come later. In the very next scene, we see Moser, in pink pyjamas, reclining on a sorbet-pink velvet flared arm sofa. She moves her body around trying to find a comfortable position, swinging her legs over the backrest and pressing her arms hard against the fabric. Subsequent scenes show a montage of Moser’s performance and object installations that get progressively stranger while an Enya-inspired track plays in the background: noodles braided into strands, a plastic glove filled with pinto beans and sauce, sausages with fake fingernails or bread with spreads of La Mer face moisturiser, which Moser eventually consumes.



Bridget Moser, *My Crops Are Dying but My Body Persists*, 2020. Partial view of the exhibition. Photo: Blaine Campbell.

There is a sense of familiarity in Moser's anxious presentation of absurdity. In their 2016 book *Are we human?*, published on the occasion of the 3rd Istanbul Design Biennial, the authors and Biennial curators Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley suggest an idea of "the plastic human"—by which they mean how the modern body, the modern human, is conditioned with and by the very artifacts that we design.¹ They highlight an ideological shift that occurred with the popularity of modern industrial and architectural design in the first half of the 20th century. Good modern design, they say, is a matter of ethics;² it should provide a respite from the shock of World War II.

Characterizing a modern room, Colomina and Wigley remark "the interior becomes a showroom full of objects. Shock is absorbed through the consumption of design."³ Moser seems to have considered this guideline in staging her scenes. She tries to make her sets appear relaxing with comfortable furniture and "shock-absorbing" objects such as a body pillow shaped like a baguette or slippers covered in fur.

Contradicting her serene set-up, Moser's narration, expressions and actions on screen evoke anxiety and self-doubt, an incomprehensibility in how to make sense of one's own body. In one scene, Moser dressed in an all-white suit side-steps across a white wall before she anxiously crawls underneath a fireplace. Is it possible all the modern products that are supposed to free us from anxiety—such as cosmetics, genetically modified food and soft furniture—are making us more anxious? Are we becoming plastic humans through our consumption? And are we fractured under the pressure to be "more chill"?

In the last scene of the video, Moser rage dances to a slowed and reverbed remix of *We Are Young*, a song by the American alternative rock band Fun. As she dances through the chorus, Moser removes her white suit and reveals a human flesh bodysuit underneath. The video ends

with Moser sitting on the floor. With one leg square on the ground and the other knee up right, Moser looks toward the floor before her eyes turn back up and stare emotionlessly at something beyond the camera.

As viewers finish watching the video and turn to exit, they notice the human flesh bodysuit that Moser wears in the video. The bodysuit lies on the floor to the right of the doors, awaiting the viewers. White Styrofoam peanuts spill out onto the floor from openings at the neck, wrists and ankles; the bodysuit is overstuffed.

Modern anxiety comes from constant pressure to maintain one's viability. Moser uses the Styrofoam peanuts to represent the amount of plastic that we over supply our bodies everyday. The more we do it, the more restless we become like Moser in this exhibition. Perhaps, good modern design does not promote good ethics like the modernists intended; instead, it creates an overwhelming selection of products for us that demand we over consume, stay perpetually happy and be anxiety-free.

1. Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, *Are we human?* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publisher, 2016), 23.
2. *Ibid.*, 90.
3. *Ibid.*, 23.

Tak Pham is a Vietnamese art curator and critic. He is a graduate of Carleton University and OCAD University. His critical writings and reviews have appeared in *ESPACE art actuel*, *esse arts + opinions*, *Canadian Art*, *The Senses and Society Journal*, and *The Dance Current* among others. Pham is currently Assistant Curator at the Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan, Treaty 4 territory, the original lands of the Cree, Ojibwe, Saulteaux, Dakota, Nakota, Lakota, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.

Andrée-Anne Roussel et Samuel St-Aubin, *Ce qui compte*

Nathalie Bachand

MAISON DES ARTS DE LAVAL
20 JUIN –
22 AOÛT 2020*

Avec l'exposition *Ce qui compte*, d'Andrée-Anne Roussel et Samuel St-Aubin – sous le commissariat d'Ariane Plante –, on nous parle avant tout de valeurs affectives et subjectives. Ce qui compte y est variable, souvent diffus et informe, potentiellement invisible et parfois même carrément inconnu ou, simplement, quelque part dans les limbes du pressenti. Ici, cela se compte d'abord en dix œuvres – vidéos et installations cinétiques ou génératives – qui se répondent les unes les autres à travers certains motifs récurrents ou mécaniques similaires. Certaines des œuvres ont par ailleurs été créées à deux têtes et quatre mains, et sont « signées » Roussel et St-Aubin.

Dès l'entrée, la vidéo *Capacité d'attention* (2020), d'Andrée-Anne Roussel, se présente comme une œuvre-clé de l'exposition : on y voit une jeune fille assise sur son lit, dans sa chambre, qui observe sa main comme si celle-ci lui était étrangère. Comme le suggère son titre, la séquence force l'attention : pendant 5 minutes, durée de la vidéo, une sensation d'inertie donne l'impression que rien n'advient. Pourtant un événement crucial a lieu : la lumière se tamise graduellement jusqu'à s'éteindre et faire disparaître l'image. Condition de visibilité ultime, le regard est donné par la source lumineuse, puis soustrait par son absence. La main, faisant l'objet d'une attention flottante, rencontre alors ce moment où elle échappe à tout regardeur : la jeune fille à l'écran et nous, visiteurs.

Cependant qu'ailleurs réapparaît le motif de la main, notamment dans *Distance critique* (2020), créée en duo, et *Doigts compteurs* (2020), signée Andrée-Anne Roussel, des œuvres vidéo sur des écrans reliés à des cadrans numériques, où l'on peut voir la rencontre de deux mains qui semblent interagir. Leur relation, qui paraît évidente au premier coup d'œil, ne l'est pourtant pas : dans *Distance critique*, les cadrans comptabilisent vraisemblablement la valeur de proximité entre les deux mains filmées oscillant à quelques millimètres l'une de l'autre, alors qu'il s'agit, en fait, d'aléas algorithmiques; puis sur un registre plus