

## ***Magical Bodies*** **A Collaborative Vision**

**An Art Essay by Yvonne Owens**

R. Michael Fisher's spheres emerge from their atmospheric, textured grounds like Plato's ideal bodies. Distended with undifferentiated potential, they bear vestigial anatomies – the suggestions of skin or hide, tongues, nipples, or *clitorii*. They have smooth, taut surface textures, gleaming amid mysterious fields of light. The spheres are potently feminine, as well as being masculine in a hermetic, saturnine sense. Some are dark and glowering – black holes occluding the fierce light that escapes the semi-circular 'event horizons' of these 'black suns.' They are dark stars that are not nihilist nemeses so much as fertile sources of 'dark matter' -- androgynous celestial bodies, glowering with virile portent – single cells on the threshold of division, ova on the eve of becoming zygotes.

They are not only voracious in their absorption of the available light within the frame (and their drawing of the viewer's eye), but also productive; their gravitas creates spatial disturbances, like low-pressure systems over the Atlantic, stirring up dynamic whorls of energy, or visual 'weather.' As with collapsing stars, their bursting light cannot be contained entirely, nor swallowed up. The impression is of such compressed heat and light – such barely contained energies -- that their escape velocity elides the consuming gravity of their solid, spherical sources. This is true also of the spheres Fisher renders a moist, dense red. But others are translucent and light as duck down. These bodies are etheric, floating on delicately streaming light like dandelions on a breeze, shedding luminosity as effortlessly as breathing. I mentally named spherical body entitled: "Archangel Gabrielle," "The Fried Egg of Life." To my eye, it portrays the cosmic chaos of messy creation even while being highly organized compositionally. Geometry enters the garden of primordial chaos in "Spirit's Door," ordering the creative cosmos' spatial dynamics. The heroic, nipples sphere still 'cooks,' however, and in image "Imbricate Structure," the visceral sphere splits and sheds its insufficient, antiquated skin, revealing the complex intricacy of its inner dimension. It occurs to me that Fisher's visual marathon is a creation cycle, informed as much by myth as by science and geometry.

Barbara Bickel partners Fisher's creation cycle with her evocations of body-centred knowing. While Fisher addresses the primary evolutionary movements of life itself, Bickel's visual discourse salutes a different order of evolutionary process. Through symbol and gesture, her figures reclaim the indwelling conscious knowledge of the feminine body. Reviled in patriarchal ideologies and theologies for millennia, feminine physiology and corporeal cognition is redeemed in Bickel's images, here subversively upheld as the proud legacy of the Judeo-Christian Eve or Magdalene, of Talmudic Lilith or Zoroastrian Jahi (the 'demon whore,' Menstruation). In Bickel's tableaux, surrendering to sensual cognition does not constitute 'lust' as vice, or 'sin.' Nor is it a corrupting 'pollution,' constituting one of the poles of the dualistic purity and pollution discourse underwriting militaristic, patristic theologies. Here, in *Elicit Bodies*, an heroic (or 'Hera-like') surrender to the incipient knowledge of the flesh constitutes a Voice. Here is risk and trust, death and rebirth, crashing/burning and rising. 'Truth' is a

responsive, emoting body. Whether Muse, divine inspiration, or the secret whisperings of the soul, Bickel's embodied voices have profoundly spiritual significance. They offer redemption, integration, dynamism, evolutionary development and, not least of all, wholeness – much like her partner's spherical bodies.

This is Fisher and Bickel's fifth dual exhibition. As in their previous shows over the past 15 years, *Elicit Bodies* combines ritual performance with artist talks on how the works encompass and express their collaborative and solo philosophical journeyings. Rigorous intellectual inquiries provide the subtext for their individual and collaborative works, as both partners are engaged in aesthetic and philosophical scholarship. Both are professional academics as well as artists, creating a demanding and dynamic, interdisciplinary fusion within their lives – and within their life together. There is a third entity presenting in this exhibition of performance and visual art, and that third being is the relationship itself. Like a magical child, it exists in the resonances and tensions among the 40 works, talks and performance piece. Its voice is single, dual and several, and can be seen and heard as embodied knowing. Fisher and Bickel speak to the eye, the ear and the flesh of one's being directly, on several levels simultaneously. The Fisher/Bickel show is on the road again in *Elicit Bodies*, a renewal of their multi-sensual, multi-media, collaborative fare for mind, body and soul.

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