

POSE/SSED



The Body Issue

APHRODITE UNRETOUCHED:
THE ORIGINAL
SUPERMODEL EXPOSED

CINDY, NAOMI, LINDA
THE OTHER SIDE OF
PERFECTION

POSE/SSED: **ANGIE LÁZARO**
AN INSIDER'S VIEW

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art.angielazaro.com

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Angie Lázaro, *Contact sheet* series: *Exposure I, III and IV*, 2025. Perspex prints, 20 x 20 cm.

A contact sheet is a series of thumbnail-sized images from a single roll of film or from a batch of photographs from a photo shoot. Traditionally used in film photography, contact sheets enable photographers to review all their shots simultaneously, and to compare individual frames for selection.

NOVEMBER

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Angie Lázaro, *Linda E: The editorial gaze*, 2025. Perspex print, 100 × 100 cm.

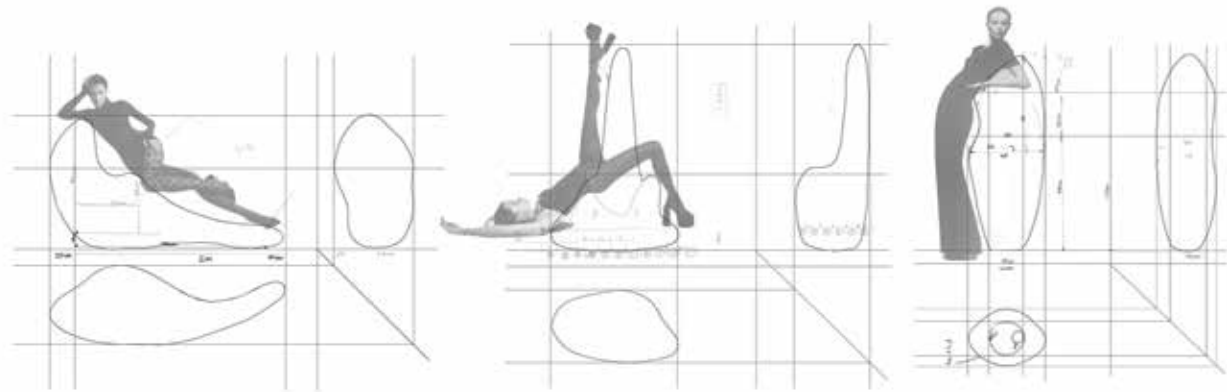
COVER LOOK

On shoot with Claire Tracey and Aphrodite.

Photography by Angie Lázaro, styling by Giorgio de Mode, makeup by Contessa Contour, hair by Fiona Fringe. Costume: Wet Splash. Shoes: Arch Nemesis. Eye-wear: Gaze & Glaze. Bag: Tote-ally Fabulous. Jewelry: Bubble Trouble. Production: Colette de Arte.

Back cover; Angie Lázaro, *Contact sheet* series: *Exposure VI*, 2025. Perspex prints, 20 x 20 cm.

ARTIST'S NOTES



Through sketches and technical drawings, I mapped the negative space and anchor points of the pose. These became the foundation for developing the sculptural forms.



The sculpting process began with a polystyrene foam block measuring $2,000 \times 1,100 \times 62$ cm.



Source material diagram of Naomi C: The consumer gaze by Angie Lázaro. Elements include: a woman's face with sunglasses (AI image); lipstick (AI image); model on beach lounger (photograph by Angie Lázaro); Jeannie D eyes (photograph by Angie Lázaro); model in studio (photograph by Angie Lázaro); model couple at pool (photograph by Angie Lázaro); bracelet (photograph by Angie Lázaro); bikini, face mole, bubble breasts, shell landscape and face partially submerged in water (Midjourney AI images); model on staircase (photograph by Angie Lázaro); sculptures (photograph by Angie Lázaro).

ANATOMY OF A COLLAGE

The collage's constituent parts are visually represented in the diagram. The main face image is composed of two AI-generated sources: one featuring a face with sunglasses and the other depicting lips submerging into water. Additional AI-generated elements include the bikini, the sandals, the shells, the bullet-like lipsticks, and subtly placed bubble-breast forms. Integrated alongside these are photographic elements I photographed at fashion shoots: namely, the primary seascape scene reflected in the sunglass lenses, the legs positioned on the edge of the lips, and Aphrodite's body, which is constructed from a combination of both a bikini shoot and a model-pose shoot I set up specifically for this project. Aphrodite's eyelashes derive from a beauty shoot with Jeannie D (a South African television personality). I also incorporate all three sculptures into the composition: the Naomi C sculpture appears in three instances, first, supporting Aphrodite's reclining pose, second, as the form of the mountain behind her, and finally, in the reflection on the upper lip. The other two sculptures are also embedded as lipstick highlights on the lower lip.

EDITOR'S LETTER



My practice emerges from years of working in the fashion and magazine industry, creating idealised representations of women where I perpetuate a gaze that transforms women into objects of idealised display. Over time, I have become increasingly aware of the contradictions between the appearance of effortless beauty and the regulatory systems that sustain it.

Drawing on feminist strategies of parody and collage, my work seeks to unravel the fictions of perfection that shape contemporary visual culture, opening critical space where feminine embodiment can be seen not as a perfected surface but as a site of tension. Through sculpture, digital collage, and video, I engage critically with the visual systems I have been complicit in. The exhibition *Pose/ssed* plays on the dual meaning of the pose as both performance and possession, reflecting my position as both participant in and critiquing fashion's representational apparatus. I reimagine *Aphrodite of Milos*, long emblematic of ideal beauty, as a central motif, interrogating how the mythic image of the perfect body persists from ancient sculpture through fashion photography to contemporary digital culture, ultimately exposing beauty as a persistent disciplinary system rather than a timeless ideal.

Angie Lázaro



THE BEAUTY IDEAL

*Beauty is MEASURED in centimetres,
fragmented into details, CALCULATED
and controlled—not born but
manufactured, MARKETED, and
endlessly reproduced through images that
shape how women see themselves*

Feminist art of the 1960s and 1970s, inspired by the women's rights political movement, placed significant emphasis on the body as a central theme (Robertson & McDaniel 2017:103). This observation reveals how feminist artists recognised the body as a source of both oppression and potential liberation. Nead (1992:63, 64) states that during these early stages of feminism, feminist art focused on the female form as “matter and process, as opposed to form and stasis”, ultimately shifting the expression of feminist art towards multiplicity, plurality, and intersectionality, reiterating that there is “no monolithic category of the body” (Nead 1992:64). I would argue that the acknowledgement of body diversity was revolutionary for its time, as it challenged not only patriarchal representations but also the early feminist tendency to assume a universal female experience. This shift represents a crucial turning point in how women's bodies were conceptualised – moving from static objects of the male gaze to dynamic sites of female agency and resistance. While early feminist art made critical strides in reclaiming the female body, broader cultural narratives – particularly those surrounding beauty – continued to reinforce limiting and idealised representations of women.

Wolf (2002:12) introduced the concept of “the beauty myth”, which refers to the unattainable beauty standards imposed by society as a way of assigning value to women. These ideals have historically shaped the visual representation of a woman's body, focused on the importance of a woman's physical appearance as a measure of success and something to embody (Wolf 2002:15). The emphasis on appearance is not only aesthetic, but social and political. As Suzanne Lacy (1996:784) states, “women's social status was seen as based in the body”, reinforcing the notion that a woman's value is inherently tied to how she looks. In contemporary society, a woman's appearance continues to hold significant social and cultural weight. Expanding on this, Bordo (2003) positions the female body as contested terrain, a site where feminists examine the complex layers of meaning embedded in visual culture. Evidently, the beauty myth remains entrenched in society and is increasingly internalised by women, sustained and refined by the media, religious narratives, and consumer culture.

Bordo (2003:283) argues for the situatedness of the body and the “authority of our own experiences”. However, if the definition of beauty comes from outside women, Wolf (2002:277) argues that “we will continue to be manipulated by it”. This external imposition of beauty standards reveals a fundamental tension between authentic self-perception and socially constructed ideals. In the 1990s, according to Wolf (2002:1), women were aware that the ideal woman was perceived as “tall, thin, white, and blonde, a face without pores, asymmetry, or flaws, someone wholly ‘perfect’”. Despite beauty being scrutinised, Western media continues to promote versions of this ideal. Tiqqun (2012:60) states that “beauty is calculated in centimetres, divided into fractions, weighed, examined by magnifying glass, evaluated in its thousands of sly details”. Such fragmentation of the female body into measurable components demonstrates how beauty standards function as a form of surveillance and control.

The ‘ideal’ woman has been subject to the beauty myth, which Wolf (2002:12) argues is a belief system, where a culturally imposed physical standard is hierarchically valued and universally acknowledged. The reinforcement of the idealised beauty standards across groupings of society has made these expectations seem natural and inevitable. Over time, women have internalised the prevailing beauty ideals, which are reinforced through visual imagery (Wolf 2002:99). The unattainable beauty standard has been glamourised and legitimised through constant repetition in visual and cultural media, giving it the illusion of being both natural and desirable. Women's Magazines

Print magazines remain relevant and consumed, although they appear to be in a precarious position due to the advent of digital magazines and online content. According to magazine editor and publisher David Renard (2006:14), magazines are “dissolving gradually into digital bits and bytes” because of diminishing readership and advertising revenue, along with soaring printing and distribution costs. Established fashion magazines, according to Emanuele Farneti, editor-in-chief of *Vogue Italia*

(System 2019), a digital magazine without the print version “would be just another site in the industry, it is about finding the right balance between paper and digital version”. Nina Garcia, editor-in-chief of *Elle US*, states that “both are essential and complement one another” (System 2019).

Women's magazines continue to encapsulate and represent women's mass culture, like the promise of a solidarity movement, although layered with contradictions. This contradictory nature is evident in how these publications represent the female form. Mulvey (1989:54) observes that the portrayal of women in mass media is formulaic, rendering the female body as an “industrialised” commodity. The commodification process is not accidental but systematic, sustained through what Bordo (2003:167) describes as a “network of practices, institutions, and technologies” that “shape and proliferate” these mechanisms. Through this network, concepts of femininity are constructed and culturally transmitted through standardised visual images that, as Bordo (2003:169,170) states, dictate the requisite “clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behaviour”. The result of this standardisation is a form of external regulation that, as Bordo (2003:166) explains, subjects female bodies to constant scrutiny, transformation, and improvement, ultimately conditioning women to perceive beauty as a self-defining attribute.

There is a stasis and homogeneity in the representation of fashion models across decades amidst cultural shifts. Fashion magazines have intermittently endeavoured to promote variety and differentiation in women's representation; however, it is not the norm and therefore the presented variety could be considered a mere symbolic representation of inclusivity.

Bordo (2003:219) argues that feminism has exposed the gendered nature of history, culture, and society; yet the challenges to patriarchal definitions of femininity and representation remain unresolved, although they are pertinent to feminists' evolving critique of women's representation (Arnold 2000:207). Today, intersectional feminism takes specific cognisance of interacting

elements of access, privilege, and marginalisation, so factors such as race, class, language, culture, (dis)ability, and location are significant. However, within the context of contemporary fashion magazines, women continue to be depicted in ways that align with prevailing patriarchal norms and conventions. Bordo (2003:250) states that images are “suffused with [the] dominance of gendered, racial, class, and other cultural iconography”. Interestingly, Bordo (2003:165) suggests that the body may “operate as a metaphor for culture”, highlighting how the production and representation of the female body in art has the potential to reflect and represent broader societal constructs, ideologies, and beliefs. Nevertheless, the inherent contradictions within women's magazines, as described by Wolf (2002:69), follow a formula that is “aspirational” and “individualist”, in which diet, skin care, and cosmetic procedures perpetuate a fantasy, compelling women to purchase beauty products and specific clothing to conform to feminine standards. Advertising reinforces this by focusing on the latest trends and “magic formulae” of feminine desirability (Mulvey 1989:54).

Bordo (2003:xx) states that no one is immune from the pervasive influence of mass media culture and the pressures of modern expectations. While feminism has contributed towards a more critical awareness of these influences, images of the unattainable body and beauty standards continue to dominate. Digital self-representation reinforces beauty norms in online spaces because it appropriates conventions of film, magazines, and the fashion and beauty industries (De Ridder & Van Bauwel 2015:334). The occasional inclusion of a broader spectrum of images (either by the media or by women participating in image generation using their smartphone cameras) is insufficient as a counter-narrative in the sea of normative stereotypical images. This limitation is further compounded by the fact that on social media platforms, images that deviate from the accepted norm or are deemed inappropriate may be censored or banned (Caldeira et al. 2018:32). Therefore, the social media space is a complex arena in which disrupting dominant representations of women are constrained, unlike the art world, which is not bound by the same commercial pressures and platform-specific restrictions.

PARODY & COLLAGE

Through parody and collage, artists QUOTE, FRAGMENT, and REASSEMBLE cultural symbols, transforming historical icons into sites of feminist critique

Collage has played a critical role in art history as a means of dismantling and reassembling meaning. Its significance lies not only in its ability to forge new visual and conceptual associations but also in its potential to critique established modes of representation and the limitations they impose (Harding 2015:23). By bringing together fragmented, often contradictory elements, collage enables artists to explore complexity, question dominant narratives, and create space for alternate interpretations of cultural symbols. When collage takes on a parodic dimension, this critical function is amplified. Parody enables artists to subvert familiar imagery and expose the absurdities or contradictions inherent in dominant cultural ideals. In this way, it adds another interpretive layer to collage, intensifying its power

Parody and collage intersect through their shared strategy of appropriation and reconfiguration. While both collage and parody function as conceptual engagements with pre-existing cultural material, they operate through fundamentally different mechanisms.

Collage is, first and foremost, a practical and material technique, the physical or digital assemblage of heterogeneous elements into a unified composition. Peter Bürger (1984:70, 72) states that collage in the historical avant-garde (particularly in Dada and Surrealism) served not only a formal function but a critical function, aiming to disrupt the institutional autonomy of art by integrating real-world fragments into aesthetic production.

By contrast, parody is a strategic mode of critical commentary, one that relies on imitation and transformation to expose or destabilise established meanings. Linda Hutcheon (1985:6) defines parody as “repetition with critical distance”, highlighting its ironic reworking of existing forms and ideologies. While both collage and parody may serve subversive functions, parody is not tied to any specific medium; it can occur in visual art, literature, or performance without the physical act of assembly that defines collage. Writing on postmodernism, Frederic Jameson (1984:65) distinguishes parody from pastiche, arguing that while parody retains a critical stance, late capitalist culture often renders it neutralised – a “blank parody” devoid of critique. Thus, while collage may facilitate parody, particularly when artists such as Barbara Kruger recontextualise mass-media imagery to challenge cultural norms, parody itself transcends collage, functioning as a broader rhetorical strategy.

Parody, as a message-oriented strategy, is an ironic or critical imitation of existing works. In postmodern theory, it is regarded as

a way to both engage with and challenge cultural norms, blending imitation with critique. Simon Dentith (2000:6) argues that parody manifests across a wide array of cultural forms, including “imitation, pastiche, mock-heroic, burlesque, travesty, spoof, and parody” in its strictest sense.

However, parody resists simple definition, as it is persistently shaped by conflicting interpretations and disciplinary approaches. Hutcheon (1989:89) states that parody is also referred to as “ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality”, as a defining feature of postmodernism. As a postmodern expression, it simultaneously employs and subverts both broad conventions and specific representational forms (Hutcheon 1989:8).

A key function of parody lies in its potential as a mode of critique. Parody typically operates by identifying specific stylistic features or conventions and magnifying them to the point of comic exaggeration. This exaggeration serves to highlight the original form’s underlying assumptions or mannerisms, thereby producing a critical commentary (Dentith 2000:32).

*PARODY itself
transcends
COLLAGE,
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strategy*

The term ‘collage’ encompasses a diverse range of artistic techniques such as assemblage, photomontage, and the manipulation of found objects (Raaberg 1998:155). Ulrich Weisstein (1978:125) argues that collage and parody are related artistic techniques, both involving the assembly of various elements to create a new whole, but they differ in their origins, applications, and focus. Fundamentally, collage facilitates chance associations and new avenues of signification. The historical importance of collage lies in its capacity to generate new meanings, interpretations, and associations, as well as in the examination of representation and its inherent constraints (Harding 2015:23). The outcome of juxtaposing incongruous elements, according to Thomas Brockelman (2001:2), may encompass irony and humour, albeit that the juxtaposition is open to multiple interpretations. The multifaceted use of parody, in Hutcheon’s (1978) view, functions as more than only a light-hearted mockery of established power structures but highlights the ideological consequences (Richards 2015:87). Bürger (1984:82) suggests that a whole emerges from the “contradictory relationship of heterogeneous elements”, which contrasts with Brockelman’s (2002:29,30) assertion that collage as a composition negates a sense of totality. Collage forces the reader to engage with the work as a virtual co-author in constructing its meaning (Drag 2019:21). There is no specific art form that will ensure a particular meaning or interpretation (Raaberg 1998:154).

Angie Lázaro, *Exposure II* (detail), 2025.
Perspex print, 20 x 20 cm

THE ORIGINAL SUPERMODEL

*APHRODITE—born from sea
foam, carved in marble,
endlessly reproduced—her
BEAUTY is exposed not as a
timeless ideal but as a
manufactured CONSTRUCT*

In my art practice, my interventions with the *Aphrodite of Milos* (c. 150–50 BC) employ parody as a critical strategy to interrogate historical constructions of feminine beauty. By engaging with the *Aphrodite of Milos* as a quotation, I call upon the statue’s referential qualities, which are described by Sam Richards (2015:79) as assuming “a new mantle of reproducer, redistributor, and redissemiator”.

Hutcheon (1978) argues that “the postmodern paradox of stylistic pluralism” leads not only to de-historicising but to adding “new and novel meanings” (Richards 2015:86). I am quoting from the historical past into a new created context, which becomes “collage” according to Richards (2015:79). Collage in this context takes place when an “assemblage of quotations becomes itself a mark of authenticity” (Richards 2015:79). Hutcheon (1989:150) argues that postmodern parodic strategies enable artists to challenge and reconfigure dominant modes of representing femininity, disrupting notions of passive consumption of female imagery by fostering critical distance. Through parody, artists inscribe the familiar visual codes of feminine representation only to subvert them – eliciting conditioned responses from the viewer and

then exposing the mechanisms by which those responses are produced (Hutcheon 1989:150).

In my work, I foreground *Aphrodite of Milos*, also known as *Venus de Milo*, as a classical Greek referent for idealised beauty. Rather than an original creation, these images of Aphrodite are a hybrid form: a Hellenistic emulation of classical art that blends neoclassical elements with “baroque” sensibilities, presenting the female body in soft, fleshy curves, broad hips, and dynamic drapery (Kousser 2005:227, 239). Carved in pure white, fine-grained marble with smoothly rendered flesh, the larger-than-life sculpture’s upper and lower bodies were dowelled together (Kousser 2005:230, 234, 238). As such, it represents a blend of innovation and imitation, adapting established traditions whilst incorporating distinctive creative elements (Kousser 2005:239).

I examine the illusion of Aphrodite as a fixed artistic and cultural archetype, revealing through parody the extent to which idealised form is a construct shaped by mutable aesthetic and ideological impera-

tives. Classical representations of the female nude, from the desiring Aphrodite to the modest Venus Pudica, share a common logic: the female body exists for visual consumption.

Through my digital collages and sculptural forms, I parody the smooth, polished aesthetics of both classical sculpture and contemporary visual culture. My mirror-polished sculpture surfaces hyperbolise the polished finish of the Aphrodite sculpture, while my collages replace her body with contemporary, idealised forms, they critique the impossible standards imposed on women throughout history.

In my practice, Aphrodite’s birth from sea foam resonates materially: working with polystyrene ‘foam’ as the foundation of the sculptures references the foam of Aphrodite’s birth. The artificial, toxic, and industrial qualities of the material starkly contrast with the myth’s natural and generative associations, creating an opposition between mythic beauty and the synthetic construction of contemporary ideals, opening a dialogue between classical mythology and contemporary beauty culture.



*Named after supermodels
NAOMI Campbell,
LINDA Evangelista, and
CINDY Crawford
these sculptures make visible
fashion's hidden
architecture*

My sculptures engage the female fashion pose, responding to Nead's (1992:11) assertion that the body is never represented as spontaneous or autonomous but disciplined into visual conventions. What appears to be effortless elegance or natural beauty is in fact a carefully mediated and choreographed construct, bound by aesthetic, cultural, and gendered constraints. Inspired by Derridean theory, this speaks to taking apart the assumed coherence of the fashion image. Jacques Derrida (1976:158) reminds us that "there is nothing outside of the text", meaning that what we take as natural must be understood as constructed within cultural codes and conventions. By deconstructing the pose, the reliance of the pose on an invisible scaffolding is exposed, unsettling the illusion of wholeness and effortlessness. The pose becomes a fragmented system, revealing how it is constructed by camera angles, lighting, ideals, and societal norms. In fashion imagery, these restrictions materialise as postures that lengthen, slim, and extend the body through arched backs, elongated limbs, tilted hips, and exaggerated gazes, from vacant to intense, enacted to accentuate and aestheticise the body. These poses require immense physical discipline and self-erasure to perform; the poses are fabrications that are rehearsed, codified, and repeated by the media industry.

I analyse three fashion poses that regularly re-emerge in female fashion editorials and advertising campaigns. I selected a reclining pose, a standing pose, and a supine position pose with a raised leg. The first is the reclining pose, which recurs across media and epochs. Its lineage can be traced to the reclining female figures of sculptors from ancient Mesopotamia, and the works of master painters. Lastly, I selected the standing pose with a convex back, which arches the body into a position of strain.

I dismantle and deconstruct the pose as object. No longer a fleeting surface, the pose becomes a structure with weight and resistance – static and contrived. The pose is held in place by points of tension within the model's body and by points of contact with external surfaces such as furniture and the floor. These points capture its underlying architecture, making visible the invisible dependencies that sustain the pose and that may, with my artistic intervention, render it an object. By reconstructing these points, I materialise the absence: the negative space that once delineated the pose becomes form. In this sense, the sculptures act as inversions of the pose, giving permanence to the invisible. The sculpture becomes a kind of reverse-engineered

inversion of the gaze. I assume the task of materialising the space around the model's body rather than her body itself, as an index of her labour and presence.

The pose, traditionally constructed for the viewer, is challenged through its deconstruction. The sculptures capture the model's instability, the need for support, and the absurdity of contorting the body into ideals not intended as everyday gestures. Fixed in rigid form, the sculptures emphasise the disconnect between visual ideals and embodied reality. At the same time, the works dissect the mechanics of the fashion pose itself, revealing how gestures are stylised to generate expectations of the idealised female body.

I shaped the sculptures from dense polystyrene foam. Each polystyrene foam block measured 2,000 × 1,100 × 62 cm. Using a hot-wire cutter, I cut the block using a process of melting as the wire glided through the material, releasing harmful fumes. The subtractive process parodies classical marble sculpting by inverting its material and ideological associations: where marble suggests permanence and noble tradition, polystyrene exposes the artificiality and toxicity underlying beauty's construction.

The sculpting process felt like uncovering the essence of the form, following the outlines of the shape as I cut, whilst staying within the limits of my design. At a certain point, there were no lines to follow except the 3D visual in my mind's eye. I immersed myself in the process, like a ritual, repeating the same fluid movements as I shaped the form by removing millimetres at a time using a stiff wire-bristle brush. At the same time, I smoothed the surface with a fine grater to evoke the erasure of 'imperfections', a sculptural parallel to the enforced slimming of fashion's idealised body. It felt like imprinting my sense of perfection onto the form. I would observe how the changing sunlight revealed areas of imperfection, which I proceeded to refine. This paralleled how I use light to shape the features of a model in fashion photography. We called it 'making magic', referring to the process of using lighting, angles, and direction to transform something ordinary into a recognisably polished and idealised fashion image.

Once completed, the sculptures assumed a presence of their own. In soft white, their volumetric form stands as the antithesis of the slender fashion model yet also reflects the larger-than-life presence of supermodels as icons. The next stage involved layering fibreglass onto the polystyrene foam sculptures. Once cured, the fibreglass surface was sanded; it had a matt, dull finish and revealed imperfections created

BENEATH THE POSE

Angie Lázaro, *Naomi C*, 2025.
Polystyrene foam, fibreglass, automotive paint,
110 x 200 x 62 cm.
Photograph by Angie Lázaro.

by the fibreglass. At this point, I handed the sculptures to a panel beater, who applied the body filler and primer, and finally spray-painted them with white high-gloss automotive paint, giving the works their polished, consumable sheen. This parallel draws attention to how both car bodywork and fashion imagery are engaged in a process and culture of surface perfection. Inspired by the pedestals of marble sculptures in antiquity, I made simplified plinths for the sculptures, using the same process to create a visual continuum.

I titled the sculptures *Naomi C*, *Linda E*, and *Cindy C* after Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, and Cindy Crawford, who were supermodels during the 1980s and 1990s and who epitomised the era when models first became global ‘supermodels’. They were elevated to celebrity status. While Campbell’s emergence as a black British-Jamaican supermodel represented a partial disruption of the industry’s Eurocentric standards, she remained subject to the same standardisation epitomised in the fashion industry. I grew up during the height of this supermodel era, and my early awareness of fashion was mediated through these images, which I both admired and internalised.

The absence of the model in my sculptures signals erasure, objectification, and a lack of agency within the visual economy of fashion imagery, despite the apparent glamour of a select few icons. The significant presence of the sculptures required an exhibition venue that could adequately showcase the voluminous undulations with enough room for viewers to move freely around them, echoing the physical choreography of the fashion shoot, where the photographer must step back to frame the scene. I enacted this approach when photographing the sculptures themselves: in a metatextual gesture, the negative space, the sculpture, became the model, collapsing the distinction between what is typically photographed and what typically frames it.

My sculptures draw on a vocabulary of anthropomorphic geometries, forms that evoke or resemble human characteristics in abstracted ways, representing the inversion or negative space of the fashion pose. My work extends to the myth of Aphrodite’s birth, in which she emerges from the sea foam or “foam-womb” (foam was said to have formed when Cronus cast the severed genitals of his father, Ouranos, into the ocean) (Hansen 2000:1–2). The name Aphrodite has often been etymologically linked to aphros (foam), with some interpretations extending this to associations with slaver, froth, or sperm (Hansen 2000:3). The white surfaces of my sculptures evoke ghostly traces made solid, of the “foam womb” and the whiteness of classical marble, with its connotations of purity and permanence.

Through this layering of whiteness and gloss, it emphasises the continuity between classical ideals and contemporary visual culture, revealing how the female body continues to be coded as desirable, perfected, and ‘natural’, despite these ideals being historically contingent and culturally constructed.

By invoking and parodying both the fashion pose and the classical figure of Aphrodite as a timeless ideal of female beauty (Kousser





BEAUTY, REASSEMBLED: COLLAGE, AI, AND THE GAZE

In a world where PERFECTION is manufactured, collage becomes an act of resistance. By combining sculpture, photography, and AI, these works reveal how fashion images are CONSTRUCTED.

The marble head of APHRODITE meets the body of a contemporary model — a composite that exposes the IDEALS shaping our concept of BEAUTY

Collage, as an artistic method, dismantles and fragments while simultaneously reassembling meaning (Harding 2015:23). Within feminist art practices, collage is employed as a strategy to critique and destabilise dominant visual codes by exposing how meaning is constructed through juxtaposition and repetition. I use collage as a method to illustrate the fashion world through various gazes. I expose the consumer's, editor's, and photographer's gaze. These gazes are all complicit in perpetuating the dominant narratives of beauty. Within the context of these gazes, I introduce the sculptures within the collages, making explicit the relationship between the sculptural forms and the poses they reference, the pose and its structure. One cannot exist without the other.

I rework the poses by collaging Aphrodite's head onto contemporary model bodies, depicting the historical notion of beauty standardisation. The figures become a hybrid of the complexities and expectations of the idealised woman's body.

The digital collage series comprises three works, printed on Perspex, each titled after the sculpture it references and set within a seascape or underwater environment. *Naomi C: The consumer gaze*, the reclining-figure sculpture, appears on a beach, the form reflected in the lenses of sunglasses to signal the consumer's gaze. *Linda E: The editorial gaze*, the leg-and-pelvis lift sculpture, is mirrored within a camera lens, suggesting the editorial gaze that choreographs and directs fashion imagery, and *Cindy C: The photographer's gaze*, the arched-back pose, is submerged; the curved underwater image evokes the photographer's gaze.

To construct these collages, I combine my own fashion and product photographs with AI-generated material to produce photorealistic digital images. Unlike traditional magazine collage, with its jagged cuts and visible joins, my digital process uses Photoshop selection tools to create seamless compositions. Although this conceals joins, the concept remains jarring, fragmented, and contrived. The resulting works resemble hyper-saturated AI-illustrations: glossy and artificially smooth, with exaggerated colours and over-processed details. The saturation heightened aesthetic mimics and critiques the artificiality of the polished visual language of fashion and advertising. The insertion of Aphrodite's sculptural head onto model bodies intensifies this tension: the expectation of a flawless face is disrupted by the dull, colourless visage of old marble, producing an absurd and unsettling effect.

At the same time, I was reluctant about collaging a white marble head onto a black model's body, as this risks inscribing racial hierarchies. Fashion imagery has long commodified racial difference while centring whiteness as the unmarked ideal, and I am conscious of not perpetuating this legacy. The challenges of cross-racial representation in post-apartheid South African art are exemplified by Candice Breitz's controversial *Rainbow nation* (1996) series and Breitz's approach provides an important precedent for contemporary artists navigating similar terrain. Okwui Enwezor (1997: 35) identifies Breitz's practice as emblematic of the tensions surrounding her process of combining diverse visual sources. According to Enwezor's (1997: 35) analysis, Breitz uses images of white women from pornographic magazines, then collages them "with the most stereotypical images of bare-breasted and bare-footed South African women, in 'ethnic' garbs [...] taken from those tourist postcards famil-

Naomi C: The Consumer Gaze

The *Naomi C: The consumer gaze* collage conveys the visual grammar of fashion photography, amplified to excess, where details are exaggerated and surface imperfections erased. The hyperreal scene features a close-up of a woman's face wearing round glasses with thick shimmering colourful rims, her face partially submerged, with waves splashing up to her lips. Her mouth is open, painted with red lipstick, the skin is rendered flawlessly, pores are absent, surface is taut, tones are unnatural, as if illuminated from within, and every plane gleams with an artificial sheen. The saturation is heightened throughout, and highlights are sharpened into crisp edges that resist the softness of lived texture. Shadows are carefully designed to optimise balance, clarity, and photographic depth.

I deliberately include supposed flaws, a

chipped tooth, a hairy mole, while surreal anomalies, such as spherical, floating balloon-like breasts, appear both in the foreground and reflected in the sunglasses. There are two shells intermingled with the bubbles and water turbulence, which refer to the scallop shell in Sandro Botticelli's (1445–1510) *Birth of Venus* (c. 1480). The balloon breasts and shells are recurring symbols appearing in each work in the series.

AI-generated water partially submerges the face, its ripples recalling both sea foam, in reference to Aphrodite's mythic birth, and turbulent waves, as if the figure is gasping for air, suggesting drowning, struggle, and erasure. The water thus becomes both a mythological reference and a metaphor for women's bodies, suspended, idealised, and under pressure.

The composition layers familiar fashion

iar to frequent safari fliers". The key distinction lies in intentionality and methodology. While Breitz's collages explicitly illustrated the violence of stereotypical representation by juxtaposing magazine pornography with tourist exoticism, my work seeks to integrate diverse representations into a unified critique of beauty standardisation in fashion media. Rather than emphasising difference through jarring juxtaposition, my compositions adopt a surrealist AI appearance that reveals their constructed nature and underlying critique. By placing Aphrodite's classical head or incorporating her facial features on bodies of diverse models, my work does not aim to erase difference but to expose the Eurocentric ideal historically projected onto all women's bodies. I remain attentive to these dynamics by reflecting the reality of fashion imagery while also questioning the cultural dominance of the white, classical head as a universal signifier of 'beauty'. I seek to avoid reifying racial difference while highlighting the shared experience of women subjected to Western standards, a system of commodification that operates across racial lines. My work invokes what Marion Arnold (1999:37) describes as engaging with experiences through imagination rather than presuming to speak for others.

While the collages reveal the constructed nature of beauty through visual juxtaposition, AI imagery introduces a further layer, highlighting how text-to-image generation mirrors and amplifies biases embedded in its datasets. In this context, the female body becomes a contested site: efforts to disrupt stereotypes and the objectifying male gaze risk inadvertently reinforcing them, especially when generated from datasets compiled with culturally dominant, media-driven ideals. These systems frequently reproduce hyper-feminised, sexualised, and unattainable images of women, echoing the normative standards promoted by mainstream media.

My text-prompted generative AI images of women are depicted as 'realistic', stereotypical, highly sexualised objects of desire. When such an image is re-generated, the woman in the picture is usually rendered topless, and through repeated regenerations, she invariably hangs herself, drowns, or becomes so emaciated that she appears to be close to her demise. Artist Micol Hebron ([sa]) argues that AI image generators "serve as a mirror, reflecting the very human tendencies, trends, and belief systems that emerge in our behavioural patterns online". Based on Russell Chun's (2025:2) content analysis of AI-generated images of women, the dominant patterns include excessive sexualisation designed to appeal specifically to heterosexual male viewers, along with age distortion, known as age compression, where younger female characters are portrayed with adult characteristics while older female characters are depicted with unnaturally youthful features. Image generated AI tools are trained on collections of image-text paired data, absorbing inherent biases present within their algorithms and training data in this digital ecosystem, thus perpetuating systemic inequities through seemingly objective computational processes (Chun 2025:3). Chun (2025:3) argues that contemporary media, increasingly shaped by AI, is producing an intensified form of ritualisation, what might be called "hyper-hyper-ritualisation" in which femininity is not only ritualised but doubly exaggerated. The result is an over-exaggeration of the exaggeration; therefore, stereotypical signs of femininity, sexualised gestures, and stylised poses are amplified to the point of parody.

tropes with unsettling distortions that expose the violence embedded in beauty ideals. A row of lipsticks, encased like ammunition, parodies the playful rhetoric of beauty marketing, transforming fashionable accessories into something menacing. They signal how consumer objects are sold as empowerment while rendering beauty itself weaponised.

I repeat this motif in *Linda E: The editorial gaze*, where handbag buckles are fashioned from lipstick bullets, and in *Cindy C: The photographer's gaze*, where lipstick bullets are repeated across the coral reef like wallpaper.

On the lips, a pair of legs resembles a cigarette, simultaneously glamorous and self-destructive. The detail amplifies the conflation of consumption and objectification: the woman's mouth becomes the site of both desire and silencing. Through this lens, the consumer gaze

emerges, where women are not only subjected to the scrutiny of fashion's ideals but are themselves positioned as commodities, endlessly circulated, marketed, and consumed (Mulvey 1989:xii). Reflected in the sunglass lenses is a scene of Aphrodite reclining on the white sculptural form. The reclining pose, an archetype of sensuality and vulnerability, dates back to antiquity; one such example is the Sleeping Ariadne. The elongated body is arranged in a recognisable editorial pose, where the viewer



Linda E: The Editorial Gaze

Linda E: The editorial gaze (above), the second digital collage in the series, presents a stylised meditation on the editorial gaze, a gaze that constructs and choreographs the subject, before the viewer encounters it. The editor's gaze pre-arranges and pre-edits what the viewer will see, which Nead (1992:11) describes as "an act of regulation". Framed within a camera lens, the model is situated in a space of surveillance, exemplified by Mulvey's (1989:13) theory of the male gaze, which holds women in a constant state of visibility and performance. The composition exaggerates a fashion editorial pose: pelvis lifted, one leg upright, almost as if in a mid-motion acrobatic display. Within the lens, the model repeats recursively, stretching into the distance like a hall of mirrors or a visual feedback loop. Unintentionally, the recursive pose becomes parodic, the rotating models referencing a washing machine cycle, exposing its resemblance to the banal mechanics of domestic labour. Each iteration of the model mimics the last, although with subtle differences, such as skin tone and shoe colour. The figures look like synchronised swimmers. The repetition signals both disposability and interchangeability.

The central *Linda E* (sculpture) creates a phallic resonance by linking to one of the meanings of *aphros*, sperm. Anchored within the spherical lens, the sculpture is partially submerged and haloed by sun

expects a perfected face, but Aphrodite's sculptural head intrudes instead. Carved in marble, drained of colour, and devoid of expression, the head resists the seamless aesthetic of the surrounding body. The comically added eyes, with feathered eyelashes, enhance the decorative quality while emphasising the unease between expectation and absurd reality. Aphrodite is repeated in the sunglasses lenses, but the two reflections differ; the bikini, shoes, and bracelet are not the same, creating a nonsensical, illogical effect.

I question representations of women by conceptualising ideas in visible form; here I reveal the artifice, the strategies of Naomi C: The consumer gaze. The source materials are codes, juxtaposed and woven into the collage, where the origin is obscured. Through this, I open a discussion and translation of plausible meaning, using codes as a means to critique the cultural constructions of femininity, identity, and visibility. See source material diagram of Naomi C: The consumer gaze on page 4.

Angie Lázaro, *Linda E: The editorial gaze*, 2025. Perspex print, 100 × 100 cm.

glare, which punctuates the leg extension. The sculpture harnesses the architecture that props the model's pelvis skyward, holding the pose in place. The performative nature of the pose, elegant yet unnatural, illustrates the constructed nature of femininity, aligning with Judith Butler's (1988:526) theory of gender performativity, where gender is not an essence but an unconsciously internalised and rehearsed spectacle. Aphrodites pale sculptural head, rendered in profile, appears cold and inert against the hyper-saturated warmth of the model's body. She wears colourful sunglasses and red lipstick, details that both adorn and obscure her identity. The stone effect resists the seamless aesthetic, exposing how women's bodies are dissected, measured, and judged. In several of the subsequent repetitive figures, however, the head is integrated by adjusting the skin tone, a visual manoeuvre that parallels the internalisation of beauty norms, where women alter themselves to comply with imposed ideals. The figures are dressed in bold graphic-print tops, yellow bikini bottoms, stiletto heels in mismatched bright colours, and jangling bangles. There is a pair of shells hanging from the fuchsia foregrounded shoe. The hair coils into DNA-shaped braids, a playful exaggeration that suggests cultural codes of femininity are often naturalised as biology. The lifted leg dangles a purple handbag (only seen on the main figure).

Angie Lázaro, *Cindy C: The photographer's gaze*, 2025. Perspex print, 100 × 100 cm.



Cindy C: The Photographer's Gaze

Cindy C: The photographer's gaze is a digital collage that fuses photorealism with subtle rococo digital art, producing a dreamlike underwater stage. The curved surface of the water evokes the distortion of a wide-angle camera lens, mimicking the photographer's submerged gaze. This refracted vision becomes a metaphor for the fashion photographer's underlying power: women's bodies are not merely recorded, but edited, and stylised to fit a framework of marketable desirability. Three figures dominate the composition. Their poses are arched, elongated, and contorted. The foregrounded model is topped with Aphrodite's marble head and décolletage. She wears a sequinned skirt, latex boots, and a multi-strand pink pearl necklace and carries a distinctive handbag crafted from a crushed eyeshadow compact with a leather strap; her posture is supported by the sculpture's ideological scaffold that upholds performative femininity. The central figure adopts a similar upright pose; she is a model of colour, with Aphrodite's facial features and holds a handbag made from a stack of shoes, and she wears a multi-strand white pearl bracelet. On the right, a smaller pale

figure with a matte marble-like finish waves ambiguously – suspended between greeting and drowning. A tattoo bearing Aphrodite's facial features in an exaggerated back-tilt pose is emblazoned on the dominant figure's thigh. This detail extends the notion of skin as a canvas to be painted, contoured, and sculpted with makeup. Three vessels within the composition function as interconnected symbols of femininity and mobility. At the bottom left, an empty shell recalls the Birth of Venus, but instead of a goddess, it releases breast-shaped bubbles as fragile ornaments. On the right, a lime-green Cadillac, submerged and immobilised, bears the number plate CINDY, invoking Cindy Crawford, after whom this collage is titled. The car's glossy finish, reminiscent of the automotive paint used on the sculptures, evokes the meticulous perfection of bodywork extended to the human form. A juxtaposed suitcase contains the tools of fashion's masquerade. Together, these vessels articulate a spectrum: the shell symbolises mythologised femininity, the Cadillac masculine-coded freedom rendered inert, and the suitcase the capitalist apparatus of femininity

with its mobile, global circulation of fashion and beauty products. These juxtapositions verge on parody, turning icons of glamour and mobility into hollow relics, their grandeur mocked through dysfunction. The central figure's perfume bottle releases jewel-like flowers rather than mist, parodying the conventional association of floral scent with femininity. Perfume, traditionally marketed as femininity's invisible accessory, is literalised and materialised. This transformation reflects McRobbie's (2002:259) critique of post-feminist empowerment through beauty consumption while reinforcing gendered hierarchies. The perfume spray becomes allegorical: the figure elicits beauty and agency, but only via commodities and within a constructed fantasy. Such details edge into parody: fashion's tropes of glamour and biology are amplified until they appear ludicrous, unsettling their claim to naturalness. The underwater setting evokes both birth and the depths of surveillance, a space of origin that is simultaneously one of entrapment. Cindy C: The photographer's gaze mirrors a wider logic: femininity produced as artifice, labour, and decoration under the photographer's gaze.



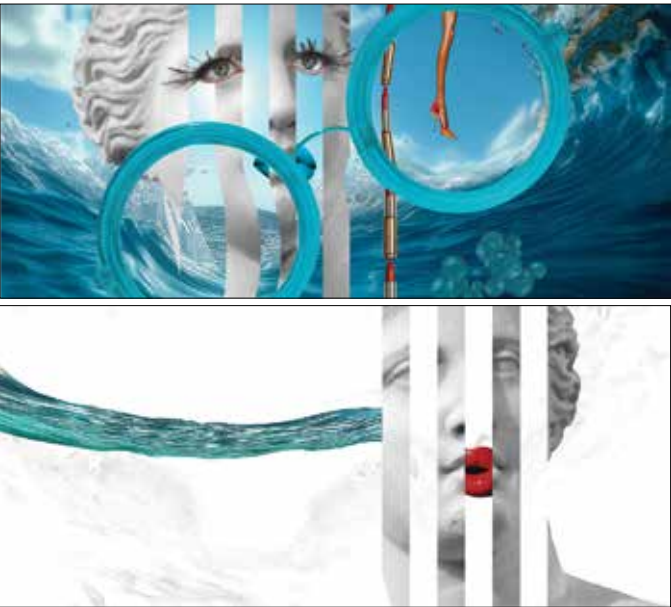
Pose/ssed by Aphrodite

Pose/ssed by Aphrodite consists of three-layered Perspex sheets in an obround shape that can be manually shifted, allowing the image to be reconfigured through movement, compelling the viewer to take an active perceptual role. The title extends from the exhibition title *Pose/ssed*, suggesting that femininity remains possessed (constrained, haunted, and commanded) by classical beauty ideals once embodied by Aphrodite, perpetuating the mechanism of standardisation as the standards shift to embody each era's particular ideals.

The back layer of this deconstructed collage features Aphrodite with feathered eyelashes, previously used in *Naomi C: The consumer gaze* but now deployed more prominently, alongside blue glossed lips and turquoise-rimmed glasses. The convex lenses distort and magnify the imagery behind them, bulging the central areas whilst warping the periphery. Despite this distortion, the vertically aligned bullet lipsticks and elongated leg appear with an artificial, hyperreal clarity. The deconstructed facial strips interrupt and fragment the lips in varying colours, disrupting visual coherence and contributing to the sense of artificial reconstruction. The middle layer repeats the motif of reflective 'breast bubbles', both as individual and clustered, which also appears in

earlier works within this digital collage series. The top layer holds the corresponding deconstructed vertical facial strips, which, if moved, will align with the corresponding vertical facial strips of the back layer to complete Aphrodite's face. Turquoise surface water extends to the left across the composition, generating a sense of tidal movement and submersion. As the layers are shifted manually, select areas emerge whilst others recede from view, producing a dynamic tension between revelation and concealment.

This process of visual disassembly and reconfiguration interrogates the broader theme of this study of cultural fragmentation of the female body within beauty regimes and media representation, foregrounding how femininity is constructed through selective emphasis and omission. Extending this exploration of fragmentation, the installation includes the *Contact sheet series: Exposures I–X*. These ten small digital prints reference the photographer's contact sheet as a working method of selection and editing. This series isolates and repeats elements drawn from the larger digital collages alongside AI-generated images that emerged during the research process, further destabilising distinctions between reality and constructed image.



Top: Angie Lázaro, *Pose/ssed by Aphrodite*, 2025. Collage composite. Perspex print, 200 x 87.5 cm.

Above left: Angie Lázaro, *Pose/ssed by Aphrodite*, 2025. Back layer. Perspex print, 200 x 87.5 cm.

Above: Angie Lázaro, *Pose/ssed by Aphrodite*, 2025. Middle layer. Perspex print, 200 x 87.5 cm.

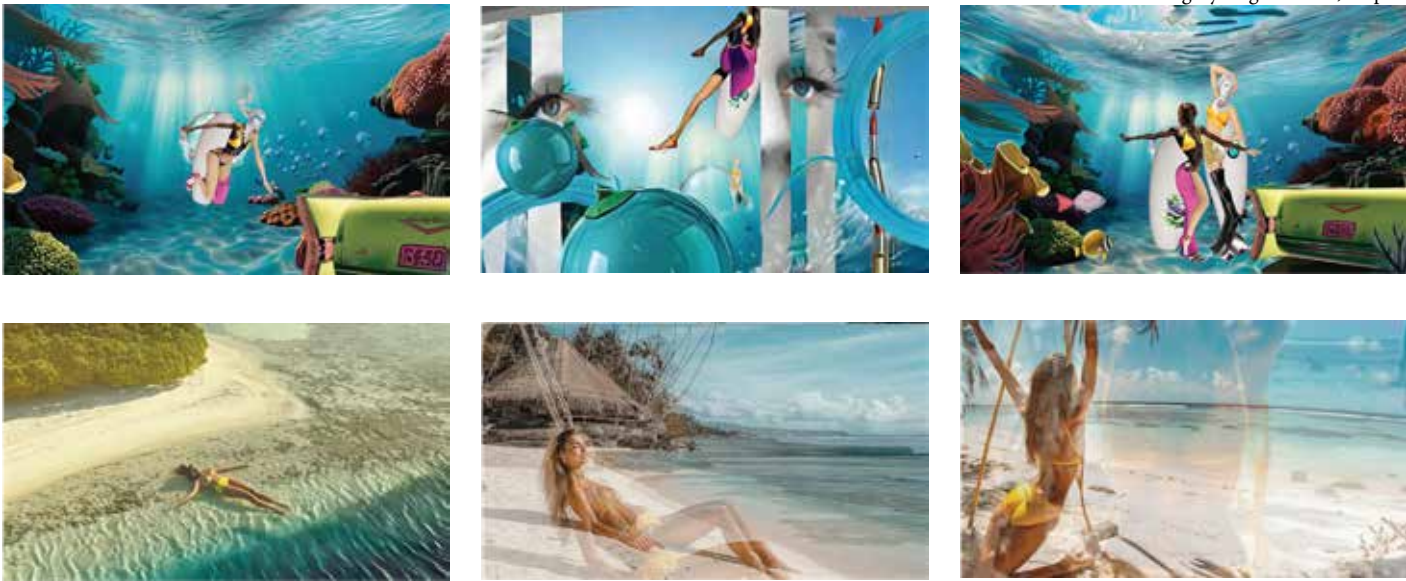
Bottom left: Angie Lázaro, *Pose/ssed by Aphrodite*, 2025. Top layer. Perspex print, 200 x 87.5 cm.

Angie Lázaro, *Contact sheet series: Exposure I–X*, 2025. Perspex prints, 20 x 20 cm.



Stills from Angie Lázaro *Pose/ssed* 2025. Midjourney-generated animated segments and text-prompted generative AI imagery. Digital video, looped.

Video



The video is a summation of the digital collages and AI-generated images, integrating the themes discussed in this chapter. A silent looped video presents a continuous flow of animated images, creating a sense of perpetual motion.

Using starting and ending images from my digital collages, Midjourney generates transitional segments in which elements float, shift, and distort, producing a surreal continuum. These animations

are at times bizarre and absurd yet visually intriguing and seductive. I include text-prompted generative AI images that depict stereotypical, self-destructive, dehumanised, and sexualised representations of women.

Through video editing processes in Adobe Premiere Pro, I co-curate these sequences, integrating AI imagery and animations into compositions that overlap and transition into unexpected juxtapositions.

This body of work parodies both classical art's idealisation of the female form and contemporary fashion photography's demand for flawless beauty, creating an absurd hybrid that exposes the constructed nature of both. Through collage and sculpture, I highlight how notions of 'timeless' beauty are continually produced through repetition, citation, and re-staging. The three-dimensional anthropomorphic sculptures operate as inversions of this system: rather than reproducing the body itself, they give permanence to the space around it, materialising the invisible scaffolding of the poses. By deconstructing fashion poses into points of dependence, the sculptures make visible the disciplinary norms that shape these poses. In this sense, I intend that they reverse-engineer the gaze, shifting focus from the performed surface to the labour and constraint that underwrite it. The absence of the model signals erasure, minimising individuality and agency to fit prescribed parameters.

The digital collages recontextualise Aphrodite within a hyperreal, surreal visual language, fragmenting her visage by recombining it with the bodies of contemporary models. The juxtaposition of familiar motifs and symbolic elements produces a deliberate disjunction that fractures the illusion of the scene. Much like classical statues and contemporary fashion images, which erase labour, imperfection, and individuality to present beauty as natural and eternal, these sculptures and collages invert the gaze, rendering the ephemeral pose a tangible site of critique. By positioning the collage series from the consumer, editorial and photographer's gaze, I expose the insider's contrived, manufactured, choreographed and manipulated construction of beauty.

Through these interconnected media, I have attempted to transform professional complicity into critical agency, demonstrating that exposing beauty standards requires working simultaneously within and against the conventions that sustain them.

