

The Erotics of Power

Kate Howe
London Solo Debut
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For those of you that have been coming to the studio for a year with no labels, titles, or back story, this is for you.

Story Map

Statement:

Almost always I paint about power and control. I am into the deep machinations and relational politics of my alien creatures—sensual manipulative beasts. They turn and dive, penetrate and flow, stream and wind around each other like eels. Never settling into the organic body or alien autopsy—they want to be beautiful, but just end up uneasy and sometimes trembling. My creatures turn into each other and back into themselves. They are just bad with boundaries. Even a single creature may feel like a struggle for power and control, as if they are trying to both turn and flatten, trying to become one face, or another. They exist in all dimensions, orientations and timelines. My alien creatures exist outside of gender and only in relation of self-to-self and self-to-other. They are expressions of visceral monstrous envy, greed, succulence, desire, ache—our growling ego. - Howe Sept 30, 2021, London

Site: Kate Howe's Left Ear

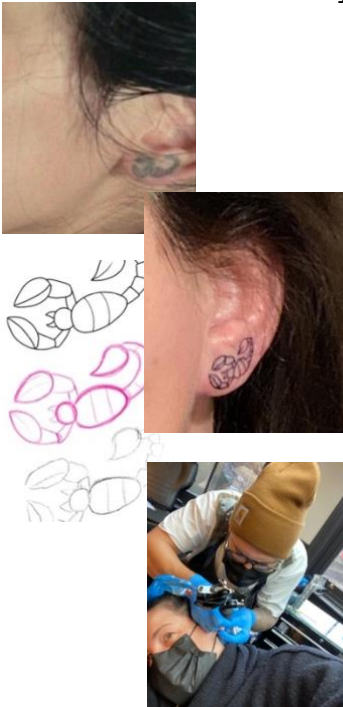
1. *Eiko Not Sada*
Tattoo intervention #2
Tattoo ink, skin
2021

The 1976 film *In the Realm of the Senses* starred Eiko Matsuda as Sada Abe in a story of erotic entanglement ending in obsession, death and delirium. This film, still banned in Japan as it was the first film in which the actors did not simulate sex during filming, is an incredible true story of a couple consumed by each other. Often cited as the most erotic film ever made, and written about extensively in academia, the male star of this film and the film's director shot to international superstardom after the daring, risky, beautiful, disturbing and challenging project came out.

Matsuda, the face of the project and the performance which carries the entire film and makes it real, heartbreaking, and somehow quite relatable, faded into obscurity after being offered only two "pink" films after the release of *In the Realm of the Senses*.

Erika X Eisen writes in her brilliant article *Desire Vessel*: 'Matsuda Eiko's career illustrates the erasure that occurs when women's creative work is falsely reduced to autobiography.' In other words, her male co-star did not have that problem. No one thought that because he had sex with her on screen, he must be "that" kind of guy, probably a prostitute, and never offered him work again. They understood that he was an actor, and this was a role. A risky role that paid off. But they couldn't make that leap for her. Matsuda did not speak a lot about herself or the film other than to make it very clear that telling this famous story required total commitment and fearlessness. She was brave for the sake of her art. She gave herself to her art. And she was erased for it.

I protest. I protest! I un-erase. I created a site-specific installation with my body as the site. It is the small scorpion Matsuda had on her ear before the film was made. It is Matsuda herself, not Abe or any fictional character she played. From here forward, we go together, Eiko and I. She is one of my ghosts.



Thanks to Wade Enstrom at Old London Tattoos for the incredible work on this delicate, fiddly, very specific piece.

Site: RuptureXIBIT

2. *Susanna and the Others (WiP)*

Variable dimensions. Oil and oil pastel on linen with stitching and wallboard transfer from Hampton Wick studio. Silk frame, Textile plushie, beading, antique silk kimono fabric. Silk frame designed by Kate Howe, engineered and made by Master Tailor Jowan John.



Artemesia Gentileschi, among other painters of her day, revisited the story of Susanna and the Elders in her practice many times.

Her earliest known signed work (1610) is an astoundingly close-cropped inverted pyramid of power, the men lurking above Susanna, close enough to her she must be able to feel their breath. There is an intense sensation of inescapability.

For me, part of Gentileschi's power comes from her ability to choose her moment - very different from the others painting this "charming" scene, and to place the camera - her point of view is startling, and different. Close. Tight. Uncomfortable.

I thought about this story, the moment she chose, and the close, inescapable, intimate and invasive point of view.

And then I chose my moment, maybe later, maybe the next day. Maybe not knowing who knows or what they, these others, know. I thought about today, about revenge porn, about up-skirting, about uncontrollable moments of shame.

My work is always born out of a resistance and often feels like it is anticipating a happening.

Like theater stagings that are at once set, actors, story, play and remnant, I connect with the haunting of my lineage in these event spaces: my seamstress grandmother, who made incredible quilts, several of which are in the "Crafts" section of the Phoenix art museum. I thought about my painter mother, my opera singing father. Everywhere I cast my eyes for examples of what life could be when I was young, they landed on unapologetically lived creative lives.

My cousins, the Quilters: musicians, pilots, historians, actors, writers, painters, inventors, passionate people living at the speed of art. We made films as a family when I was young, my dad performed a vaudeville act. Theatre was by and for family and friends. Storytelling was a way of weaving us together as a family.

Mixed in with these ancestors are the threads and voices of the artists who led me here: Gentileschi, O'keefe, Bourgeois, Stockholder, Hatoum

3. *Sticky*
2021. 220 x 220 cm. Oil, rapidograph pencil on canvas



This was the first canvas I had prepared with Rabbit skin glue, and the somatic experience of painting on the canvas prepared this way was intense, and delicious. My interaction with the surface changed when the preparation changed, my brushstrokes became longer, slower. I was thinking about Sticky Adhesions, and I'd been to see Michael Armitage at the Royal Academy. I looked at his crowds of people, the incredible arrangements and almost pastiche quality of these beautifully rendered figures, and thought about how we imprint on each other even as we simply walk by each other. I thought a lot about delicacy, thinness, fragile ideas, tissue paper, connections.

Site: Inner Courtyard

4. *Wrap and Roll, baby. I float with you. (Martha)*
2022. 115 x 170, oil and oil pastel on canvas. In private collection.



Working out the color and play between flatness and depth in this study for a very rare commission for a dear friend who helped us move to London. The underpainting was the study, and then I accidentally finished this painting and ended up really liking it as an object in its own right.

5. *No, Dr. Patel, it's not (WiP)*
2022. 488 x 220 cm, Chinese Vermillion Oil on pieced linen. Linen piecing in collaboration with Jowan John.



The stitch as a suture, a bringing together, a healing, leaving a scar, a mark of having come back together. Like my body, like my relationships. Work leaves a mark. Labor as love, labor as a force of change. This piece was a total surprise and was a response to my as-still undiagnosed health issues. We do know it is not a strained neck muscle, however.

6. *And do not saw the air with your hand too much, thus. Hmm?*

2021. Variable dimensions. Oil and oil pastel on linen with metal, stitching, plastic, leaves and dirt, festoon lights and fiberboard transfer from studio wall. (Home of fiber transfer: Battersea Royal College of Art studios).



Named after I went and saw Sir Ian McKellan in Hamlet at the Theatre Royal, Windsor in fall of 2021. He was so astonishing that I went and saw it four times. I sat on the stage every time, in nearly the same spot, and watched him -watched alchemy, ease, embodiment.

In making this piece, I had been thinking about Theatre, drama, manipulation, power, control, relationships, and embedded messages.

I thought about simplicity, sweatpants & traveling troupes.

When I brought this piece home to my Hampton Wick studio from the Battersea RCA Painting studios, and we hung it like a tarpaulin in the courtyard, it transformed itself.

It suddenly had a touch of Midsummer Night's Dream to me, a play in the woodland off the back of a wagon. An intimacy, which surprised me as it's a really big oil painting.

The title comes from a moment when the Prince is instructing one of the players on how best to perform his role in "Mousetrap," the play which eventually catches the conscience of the King.

Why Hamlet? Why four times? I have learned that it's best not to ask why. When something grabs me like that, a haunting, I think it's also a whisper and a calling... "follow me, there's more..." and there always is. Hamlet, and his ghost, are ghosts of mine as well.

7. *The injury I must do to them, if I like them, I must do in private.*

2021. 214 x 214 oil and oil pastel, rapidograph pencil on canvas.



After Francis Bacon *Study for a portrait of Lucien Freud*. Experimenting to see if I could use anything as a shape generator, including direct influences like Bacon. The title is a quote by Bacon to his frequent interviewer David Sylvester. Sylvester has asked Bacon if he can paint with his models in the room. The title is his response. I thought about body, breast, MRI, sickness, intensity, sun flares, landscapes and forbidden relationships.

8. *Ren Finds the Mothership*
2021. 220 x 214. Oil and oil pastel with rapidograph pencil on canvas.



Study for a large humming sculpture that artist Ronan Porter and I plan to erect in an abandoned, large, echoey subway tunnel. The sculpture has an audience performance piece attached to it.

Site: Rear Gallery (aka “the drying room”)

9. *And that shock of knowing, it never left her.*
2021. 480 x 220 x 40 cm Oil and oil pastel on canvas with fabric, gromets and trickline.



The first off-the-stretcher painting I made, I love the droop and sag and fat rolls, the softness that comes to the painting materially when it is off the stretchers. As this piece sagged onto the floor I found its graceful drape an invitation. I thought of forts, huts, hunting blinds. This is also the first multi-figural piece I attempted. I was thinking of penetration, surprise, subjugation, and shared experiences which are perceived very very differently.

10. *An almost perfect lie. (Michael)*
2021. 200 x 200 cm oil and oil pastel on canvas.



Memory of glacier national park and the beauty that was promised floated on the lie of a madman I was going to marry. I approached this as an image generator in order to find out if I need a violent emotional charge to paint, does it help? (no.) Can I use memory of place as a shape generator? (yes.)

11. *10,000 gates and the shadow of your blue eyes. (Sy)*
2021. 214 x 214 cm. Oil, oil pastel and rapidograph pencil on canvas.



Using memories of friends and family I cannot see because of the pandemic as a shape generator. Sy was 94 at the time of this painting, and turns 95 on the 27th of this month. He's one of my dearest friends. I painted this after we spent a month in Japan together after his wife of 67 years passed away. She was a very accomplished New York sculptor during the Ab Ex heyday, and he supported her completely, and misses her very much. I listen to a lot of jazz, and I also do a lot of spoken word. This painting is the closest I've come to playing jazz with my paintbrush. Stan Getz, Miles Davis, Oscar Peterson, Ben Webster

12. *Chill out, slow down. (Alan)*
2021. 214 x 214 cm oil and oil pastel on canvas.



Wondering if I can sneak a second figure in, still using relationships (challenging as well as exciting) as image generators.



13. *Up through the sieve of life with me. (Miriam)*
2021. 220 x 220 cm. Oil, oilstick and rapidograph pencil on canvas.

Miriam was one of my first friends in London. I met her when we were living in Clapham, and now she helps me in the studio when she has time. One very hot day we were working together, and I wrote a poem about her, and then made this painting. The colors are inspired by the headscarf and skirt she was wearing that day. Her color sense is all over my paintings. I was listening to Yosi Harikawa's album "Wandering" on repeat when I made this, and a few of the other paintings in this cycle. Ritual and repetition helped me to hang on to the thread I had just found. This was the third painting I made in this series.

13. Tuck and Roll, Yo. (Peter) 214 x 214 cm. 2021. 220 x 220 cm. Oil, oilstick and rapidograph pencil on canvas.



Still using memories of friends I can't see because I moved during a pandemic as image generators. Using black for the first time ever in my paintings. I turn all of these paintings as I make them, and have always joked that when they will be shown, I'll ask that they get spun once a day.

14. *You can't just show up. (the "other" Peter)*
214 x 214 cm. Oil, oilstick and rapidograph pencil on canvas.



The first in the series, I made this painting when I was getting ready for my Grand Opening party in June of 2021. I was sitting on my couch, holding a tea towel in my lap, when I got a text from a person who I have removed from my life as they trespass my boundaries. "Was really hoping to surprise you at your grand opening. Wanted to just show up. Surprise!"

I stared at my phone, I looked at the entry to my studio courtyard. In my mind's eye, I saw him walking into my studio, my heart, my womb, my protected, generative space, this building which is like a physical manifestation of my mind. I felt sick. I looked at the tea towel in my lap, now twisted, and I thought: That's how I feel. I feel tight, like that. And I stood up and looked at the towel, and started drawing. Eventually I dropped the towel and started painting. The towel stopped being the towel, the shapes filled and flattened, I felt it had something body, something medical diagram, something alien, something wet bio, something internal, something unknown. And it was resisting resolving. It was resisting. Nothing was ever the same again after that.



Site: Darkish Room

In this space, you will find several pieces sitting together in a sort of experiential installation. This is a glimpse of where the work is going.

Thank you!

Thank you for spending your time with us at the studio. Without you, your dialogue, time, and energy, the work doesn't live.

Love,

Kate and Family

No one succeeds alone. No one. Every one of these paintings exists thanks to the tireless giving of the people who help me work through a very serious health condition which I live with. **My husband, Tom** works full time at his own company and also works as my sounding board, art work hanger and mover, and is responsible for all of the improvements to my systems for working. **Ellen Wight**, my daughter and a talented actor and follow spot operator, is his assistant. **Mariya** is Ellen's friend and she and Ellen have spent hundreds of hours painting the studio, and helping me push my finished paintings through the industrial sewing machine. **Sadie Wight**, my younger daughter and a painter in her own right, listens patiently and intently to hours of rambling chat about art. **Veronika Benk** (and her baby, really...) run the studio and handle all of our bookings and web work. **Miriam Nakiwala** assists me in the studio. **Jowan John** mentors me on the sewing machine and makes pieces which are above my paygrade and don't need to carry the mark of my labor and learning (look closely at the large paintings, you'll see where I ripped stitching out of the face of the finished painting!). **Ronan Porter** worked as my social surrogate for a year while I learned how to manage my illness and my practice along with showing. **Lara Davies** and Ronan are my art heart home. **Connor Deardon** is the landlord for this amazing space, took a chance on me and helped me (and is still helping!) to turn it from a run-down workshop with no running water or electricity into the creative space ship that it now is. **Ray and Jens** from Quest Electric did all of the electrical work and helped us get the incredible museum quality lighting in the space.

Thanks to my incredible tutors at the Royal College of Art, especially Jonathan Miles, Pamela Golden, John Slyce, Gemma Blackshaw and Milena Dragicevic. Thanks also to Betsy Fahlman of Arizona State.

Thank you to the incredible community of Hampton Wick who have welcomed us and our family, to the first six ladies who came for tea that chilly morning, and kept coming every time we opened our doors.

Finally, to our London family, Phillipa and Skye Bond and their children, Rowan and Elliot Bond, the original members of the Silly Art Club, who would come and have tea bundled in jackets in the cold, damp, rainy studio, and who made us feel whole in a strange land. We love you.