

Source: Instagram November 2023 @susanmorris1001



Denise Webber, *Clay*, single screen video, 1998

SOUND ON! I've been meaning to post about this wonderful work, *Clay*, 1998, by @denisewebberartist ever since I saw it at her studio in September. This wasn't the first time I'd seen it though, because Webber made it while attending a course I ran at Tower Hamlets College London, between 1995-98.

The head of school had invested in then brand-new Power Macs -7200, 9500 and 9515s. I was invited to put together a training course and did so, aiming it at practising artists and advertising it in Frieze magazine [pic 3]. No one could get their hands on these machines at the time - too expensive and anyway how to use them? I didn't have a clue how to use them either, so organised trainers to come in and show us. It was all very exciting, although with only 16 MB of RAM and 1 GB on the hard drive you couldn't do very much. And yet! Denise made this.

Long fascinated with Muybridge, Webber saw that 'he clearly relinquished the scientific reins when it came to photographing women. While the men are shadow boxing, throwing boulders around, firing guns etc., the women are hanging around smoking', smiling conspiratorially as they pass one another by. Webber was struck to see this 'natural feminism, alive and well, pre-cinematic, happening in 1885'.

Animating the images by scanning each frame, she worked in 'Layers' in an early version of Photoshop. Is it an exaggeration to suggest that this work sits at the cusp of photography and what was then called new technology? In 1998 I co-curated the exhibition What is Photograph? @fiveyearsarchway. Gilda Williams reviewed it and rightly claimed *Clay* as 'the one show-stopping piece' in the show. Williams notes 'the sense of celebration in the belated resurrection of these ghosts, who, until now, seemed only the victims of voyeurism, art history and mean 19th-century science.' As for Webber, she states that her preoccupations, such as 'the idea of regressing into a feral female as a form of protest or subversion' have remained consistent over the years... see @closeitd soon!

CLAY was later included in a number of international exhibitions. An edition was sold to the Arts Council England Collection #fuckingfabulous #feralfemales

Susan Morris is a British artist, diarist and archivist