

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY
Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building

**Defamiliarising the Familiar: The Distorted Body in
Photography**

by

Lin Wei

A Thesis Submitted
In Partial Fulfilment Of The
Requirements For The Degree

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Lin Wei declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Abstract

In the context of my photographic practice, this practice-based research investigates visual distortions of the human body through the application of techniques available to photography within a studio environment. Despite an understanding of the motivations and contextual reasoning for why surrealist and contemporary photographers distort the human body, the technical considerations of photographic distortions have been under-represented in photographic studies. This research is critical of the lack of understanding such techniques. The research on visual distortions is situated within the context of defamiliarisation and Freud's theory of the 'uncanny' (Freud 1919), which refers to an estranged yet familiar sensation, and is a pivotal component in the examination of visually distorted human bodies that do not conform with normative perceptions. This study comprises photographic experiments based on three main photographic techniques: distortions by way of concealment, distortions through the mirror, and distortions from post-production manipulation. Each technique is divided into sub-methods, which demonstrate the capacity of each technique for generating distortions of the human body within the photograph. This research is primarily situated within the context of Surrealism, for surrealist photographers were the first to engage in photographic experimentation to distort the body for the purposes of artistic expression. Thus, the established techniques of this research are supported by a technical analysis of comparative surrealist photographers, as well as contemporary photographers servicing the legacy of Surrealism, who critically engage with principles of the 'uncanny' in redefining perceptions of the human body through diverse photographic experimentation.

Biography

Lin Wei is a photo-media artist based in Sydney who has exhibited both nationally and internationally since 2011. Wei's practice deals with transformational body iterations that question the stable and physical nature of the body through the lens. Her work explores photography's ability to illuminate fictitious bodies that transgress the boundaries of real flesh and affect human sensibility. Lin Wei employs the body's inherent capability to transform and manipulate itself through posture; at times her practice invites consideration of the body's relationship and collaboration with objects and material surfaces, and how they can reconfigure the representation of the normative body. Of further interest to her work is the intangible nature of photographic lighting to manipulate the body.

Her photographs often concern distortions through defamiliarisation, referring to the Freudian uncanny, which is described as something strange yet familiar. To this extent, Lin Wei is interested not only in capturing images of distorted bodies, but also in revealing the misleading impressions that the most familiar human object, the body, can unconsciously produce.

List of Exhibitions

- 2018: Manifest Gallery 5th International Photography Annual Exhibition-in-print
- 2017: Reflections, Mohawk Gallery, Ohio, USA
- 2017: Transference, Gaffa Gallery, Sydney, Australia
- 2016: 8th Annual Nude, Manifest Gallery, Ohio, USA
- 2016: Jarvis Dooney Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- 2015: The Distorted Body, Central Park, Sydney, NSW
- 2015: Form #5, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, NSW
- 2014: N.A., Home@735 Gallery, Redfern, Sydney, NSW
- 2014: N.A., Rubicon Ari, Melbourne, VIC
- 2014: UTS Honours Graduation Exhibition, UTS ART Gallery, Sydney, Australia
- 2013: Situations, Boutwell Draper Gallery, Sydney, Australia
- 2012: Autonomy, Frasers Gallery, Sydney, Australia
- 2012: Parlour 25: The Mirror Parlour, MLC Centre, Kaldor Public Art Projects, Sydney, Australia
- 2012: Parlour 25: The Doppelgänger Parlour, MLC Centre, Kaldor Public Art Project, Sydney, Australia
- 2011: Photographic Intervention, Frasers Studio, Sydney, Australia