

**IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE BODY IN
SELECTED CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS**

By

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF VISUAL ARTS

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Date: November 2008

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that Identity Politics and the Body in Selected Contemporary Artworks, submitted for the degree M A Visual Arts at the University of South Africa is my own original work. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

C de Villiers

November 2008

TITLE:

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ABSTRACT:

This dissertation concerns the socio-cultural politics expressed in the performances of Matthew Barney, Steven Cohen, Marina Abramović, and the 'Pop' artist Madonna. The contention is that these artists mirror and dramatize marginalization and seem to reflect a desire to resolve conflicts experienced between social and psychological identities in contemporary society. The premise of this study is that these performers engage in a 'dialogue' with viewers as a form of self-preservation and self-healing.

The Performance artists' measure of socio-cultural tensions suggests the merging of mass media entertainment, theatrical devices and other cultural practices such as fetishism and rituals involving altered states of consciousness, props and allusions to shamanism. An ancient modality of healing, such as shamanism, when appropriated by artists, seems to reflect an urgent phenomenological need of the individual within Western society for overcoming feelings of powerlessness as a type of therapeutic practice. The Performance artists' Othering is acted out as a survival mechanism addressing and questioning the 'degradation' imposed on marginalized individuals who challenge the traditional notion of authentic identity and the 'classic' body.

LIST OF KEY TERMS:

Abramović, (Marina); Alienation; Barney (Matthew); Cohen (Steven); Eroticism; Fetishism; Hermeneutics; Therapy; Identity politics; Madonna; Neo-baroque, Neo-Gothic; Performance art; Phenomenology; Shamanism.