

VICTORIA DEBLASIO
on
Rachel's Ballard's *Use Me: Bathroom Edition*



We are living in a divisive world. Marginalized groups are under constant attack and social surveillance, agitated by our current administration's continuous espousal of policies to which the only intent is to keep others in regimented and submissive. SOUP Experimental's *Tough Times* exhibition encapsulated what it means to be a marginalized voice reaching to speak their needs and concerns in a world that isn't listening. The thoughts, feelings and opinions were rampant throughout the exhibition, and among those was Rachel Ballard's *Use Me: Bathroom Edition*. In Ballard's video installation, her character Amber Fine Sparkle guided us through her own "porcelain paradise" to make a commentary on the female form as an object. Ballard cites from Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema* essay, taking inspiration from the ideas that the unconscious patriarchal society has changed the structure of film. The male gaze is imposing, and women in film (not matter what they're doing) become the subject of this stifling and sexualized type of viewing. Riddled with sexual undertones, Ballard's *Use Me* is subtly criticizing this method of viewing. Sexuality becomes materialized in the form of the every-day objects of the bathroom, and feminine sexuality is expressed through her crafty use of subtle language through the lens of an informational video.

Having grown up as a woman in our patriarchal society and having personally read Mulvey's essay, I connected to Ballard's piece immediately. The language she used to describe the porcelain felt as though she was talking about my body as a woman, describing it as something that "loves to be used, [making] it feel wanted." Women constantly struggle, especially in modern day, with being simple objects for consistent use under the assumption that we gain something from this. It is oppressive and demeaning behavior, and Ballard fearlessly tackles it in such a way that if you are not paying close attention, you might miss it completely. Putting this conversation about sexuality in a space that we all recognize and can associate with (the bathroom) makes it impossible to ignore. The process of relaxation, release and cleansing is how we as women are supposed to deal with this type of behavior from men; why not criticize it in the bathroom? Strong subconscious emotional responses and questions can be taken from Ballard's piece, and I feel like her critique is successful. Women cannot discuss these issues on the regular without facing some sort of criticism or backlash from those powers-that-be that are trying to silence them to perpetuate the systemic issues of our society. Ballard did exactly the opposite and gave way to opening the discussion about feminine sexuality in a way that I've never seen before.

Rachel Ballard's Portfolio
www.rachelballard.com/

Thank you Victoria.

Sincerely,

SOUP experimental