Slip/Hold
Big Pencil Studio, Preston

Natalie Tirant and
Johanna van der Linden

My Body, Squashed

Johanna van der Linden and Natalie Tirant encapsulate the unknown, and distort the viewer's perception of what the human form is in *Slip/Hold*. It is squashed, pressed, disgruntled, close, slippery, and held.

In Tirant's photographic series *Residual Traces*; there is skin, and flesh, and moles, and hair. *Residual Traces II* is encapsulated in a broad frame. The bright white embraces the image in a spotlight and whilst I know that I am looking at a human body, it remains uncanny in its form. There is a focus on texture and shape, deep shadows and movement. The body is distorted, and there is delicacy in the folds of skin, and softness in the pressing of flesh that is contrasted by the contortionist shape of the model.

Van der Linden's etching *Ascending* is contained in large snaps, portraying blurred, grainy limbs and faces. They are dark, detailed and disconcerting. They seem to hold an amorphous being; I spot knees, hands and faces, yet cannot clearly see a body. These disjointed things form something else entirely, beyond that body. The T-shaped print portrays snippets from a video of US Marine soldiers scaling an oiled obelisk. The configuration of the prints and the oversized scale is intimidatingly cross-like, mirroring the unattainable obelisk's phallic shape. Van der Linden exposes the musculature and desperation in these images, the body pushed to exertion.

Taking imagery from baroque iconography of the deposition of Christ, in *Deposition study no.1* are fingers pressed to a side, exploratory and discerning, searching and gripping in the small space. In *Deposition study no.2* the grainy image is, like *Residual Traces II*, enclosed in a frame, this time steel. Inside, there is a woman whose face is filled with something uncertain—grief? Acceptance? Where it touches her, the frame is harsh: blunt corners, rectangular in shape, lines look sharp enough to cut. Yet her prison (or is it her pedestal?) is an organic shape, flowing and obscure. It harkens back to the piles of bodies enveloping the greasy obelisk. Soft, squashed skin and flesh, pressed against a sharp, cold, menacing object. The insides of these images maintain the same, edged, harsh lines, yet when zoomed out, the image becomes molten, its shape nebulous.

I can see this relationship between hard and soft in *Residual Traces I*. There is a curved spine, vertebrae through skin, and this rigidity is pressed against soft flesh behind it. It takes an animalistic shape, further altering my perspective of the bodies before me, zoomorphing what I have already taken in and accepted as the human form. *Residual Traces III* morphs into rolling hills, spotted plains and deep waters. But whilst the images are obscure, there is a familiarity to them as well. Humans recognise humans. I can see the outline of human bones, of human hair. Moles dot the skin like landmarks, and the shadows are created by human limbs. The closeness of the bodies pressed and squished together makes me feel comfortable because I share it with them. Their nakedness is not shameful, their contact is not sexual, and their bodies are no-longer their own.

This closeness of bodies, squished yet un-contained, mirrors in van der Linden's work, however the contrast in forms is unique. Tirant's soft, creamy textures are far from van der Linden's dark, mottled prints and paintings, yet they both contain organic, slippery holds on the human body, and our own perspective of what those bodies are. I'm left with a feeling of obscurity, not entirely sure of the specificity that van der Linden and Tirant have portrayed. Yet in them, I grasp at familiarity, and I have a sense that although I cannot label what I see, I know they belong to me.

Writing by Rachel van der Linden