

EMBODY

Contemporary Sculptural Glass Exhibition
Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, 1998

A short excerpt from an essay by Martina Margetts, featured in the exhibition catalogue:

Whereas internationally, glass sculpture has often been ghettoised within the art world by material, in *Embody* the equality of material and ideas with sculpture in general is emphasised by the conjunction of glass with other materials and media - video, found objects, performance, photography, mixed media. Françoise Sergy, for example, combines performance, digital imaging and installations to record the emotional effects of bodily operations, especially IVF and LH which try to promote pregnancy. The thwarted wish to be a mother emphasises expectation and longing, a poignant state of suspended animation in which, in Freudian terms the need to fill the void of existence cannot be fulfilled, only expressed through desire.

Sergy's use of glass is symbolic. As the only exhibitor untrained in glass, she uses the material architecturally to define space and physically to allude to difficult experiences. She has collaborated with Emma Woffenden for the *LH Phantom* performance and installation, both commissioned for the exhibition. In this work the glass-block base represents the hard, cold hospital bed as well as echoing institutional spaces divided by such blocks, where people and events are only partially revealed. The huge glassblown 'glove' by Woffenden which Sergy wears in the performance, is 'heavy, symbolic of holding a child I don't have, a weight that I have to bear'. Sergy adds to the bleak, ritualised setting with projections of ultrasound pictures of everyday objects - teddy bears, light bulb - and her X-rays. 'When you are being treated,' Sergy explains, 'you are very exposed: the inside of you is being revealed, but in a very clinical way.' It is as if perhaps the organic is subject to control, hi-tech is dominating nature.

In making her theme the body itself, a site of transgression and transformation, Sergy reaffirms the body 'as intelligent and essential to us. I'm trying to say in a modern rather than a spiritual way that the body is a universe.' She disapproves of cosmetic surgery, and of artists such as Orlan who explore/exploit this. 'My work is experimental, not aesthetic. I'm not concerned with appearance.' Sergy also maintains a feminist viewpoint, in a humanist, not triumphalist way: 'In the 1990s, there has been a huge backlash against the idea that women are oppressed - but I think they *are*. Some women are getting to the top and playing the system, but I *know* women being powerful is still the exception.'