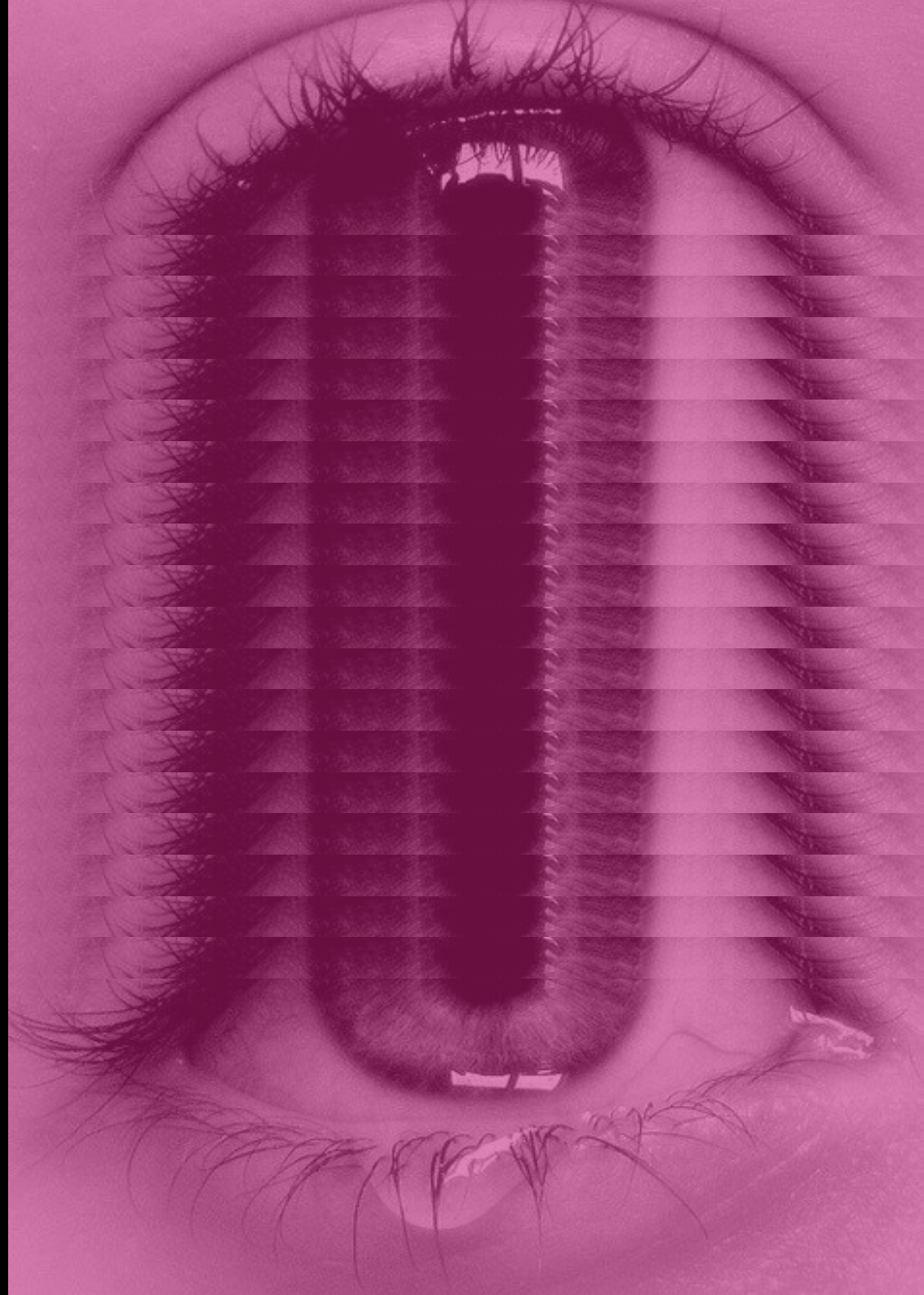


• be one with the gak •



# Like a heartbeat drives you mad

andrea meacham

## exhibition text • lewis gittus

♪ *Like a Heartbeat Drives you Mad* ♪. So sings Stevie Nicks in Fleetwood Mac's melancholy anthem, *Dreams*. A song recorded while the individual and entangled lives of the band were in utter turmoil. Divorce, affairs, and addiction, all of which raged under that wafer-thin veneer of soft-rock cool. The claustrophobia of the acoustically 'dead' drums combined with Nicks' vacant vocal delivery, charged the atmosphere of *Dreams* with enough static to power a medium-sized city. I'm sitting here listening to this song again after so many years, and I'm struck by its muted fury, the uneasy mix of pathology and catharsis. It's a slippery channel through which self-soothing takes over and starts propagating its own noxious spasms. But what exactly does any of this have to do with an exhibition of video, sound and sculptural works?

The brilliance of the song, ♪ *Like a Heartbeat Drives you Mad* ♪, lies in the use of material forms to produce intense psychological outcomes. Forget narrative (the mania for arranging things into little stories), because it's all in the texture, the stifled acoustics of the drums, the measured delivery of the vocals, the flaccid slide of the guitar. This is the psycho-materialist terrain on which Andrea's exhibition, ♪ *Like a Heartbeat Drives you Mad* ♪ sets up shop; a space where psychology is no longer a question of interiority, but where it glides through the material world - the vast outside - unchecked.

One of Andrea's primary targets for this externalised psychology is body itself. Mapping weird textures over its surface as blue goo amounts to a calculated damaging of the body's image. Throughout her video, sculptural, and sound works, Meacham reimagines the body as a self-emulsifying slag heap. Tactically revving the dual engines of horror - those of attraction and repulsion - she draws us into a constellation of body-textual experiments. Rubbery blue slime slips down a face, smoothing and smothering. Something is not right here. Feet massage gloop into fabric. A chain of acrylic nails shimmers, at once both repellent and alluring. A giant sequined eye silently watches.

Andrea has a name for this psycho-materialist slime-space, a space where the textual image of the body and its modes of reception begin to liquify, she calls it *gak*. "Be one with the *gak*". I'm reminded of Georges Bataille's sensitivity to that which is formless; his championing of that which has "no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm."<sup>1</sup> and later, "...like a spider or spit."<sup>2</sup> For like Bataille, it's all about bringing us down in the world, down to the level of the big toe, to something utterly inhuman and stuck in the muck.

This descent, this methodical lowering of the human in further enacted through the use of sound. Disgusting sounds that are all dripping, splashing, sighing, groaning, and grunting. A mess which jettisons attempts at narrativization while idling in a sub-verbal delirium. To put it another way, these are all the 'unwanted' sounds that are meant to be filtered out when enhancing the dialogue film and TV, those sounds with "no rights in any sense".<sup>3</sup> Here they are pushed to the foreground, bringing with them a wet distortion, a self-emulsifying violence. Again, Meacham discards narrative in favour of texture, preferencing low sounds for their psycho-materialist affects.

While writing this exhibition text, there is sense that ♪ *Like a Heartbeat Drives you Mad* ♪ is already slipping away, that any attempt to reconcile it into a cohesive whole is doomed from the outset. Its modes of genre (pop-music video, instructional media, ASMR kinks, beautician treatment rooms, and cult cosmology) too fragmented; it's imaging and sounding of the body pulling all at once in too many directions. Moral and ethical interpretations are headed off at the pass, providing the conditions for a kind of demilitarized zone, a space of fecund uncertainty. Perhaps this is what Donna Haraway was getting at when she advocated for "contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes"<sup>4</sup>, and for "...the tension of holding incompatible things together..."<sup>5</sup>. Somewhere within these strange and contradictory folds, an anti-idol traces the shimmering, sequined anatomy of spiders, cyborgs, and spit.

<sup>1</sup> Bataille, "Visions of Excess" 31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Bataille, "Visions of Excess" 31.

<sup>4</sup> Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 149.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid