



Rachel Maclean

Make Me Up, 2018
Digital video

Newcastle University REF 2021

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Main Panel D, Unit of Assessment 32: Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory



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Make Me Up (300-word statement)

Make Me Up is a film written, designed, edited and directed by Rachel Maclean.

Produced by Hopscotch Films with NVA, the film was a commission for the BBC, Creative Scotland, and 14-18 NOW: WW1 Centenary Art Commissions, supported by Jerwood Charitable Foundation, the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the Department of Digital, Culture Media and Sport.

The film is part of *Represent*, a series of works inspired by the Representation of the Peoples Act 1918 which invited female artists to explore democracy, equality, and inclusion in contemporary Britain.

Responding to this brief in *Make Me Up* Maclean considers both the achievements and the complications of contemporary feminism, and sets out a discussion of how women's bodies, voices and minds contend with a world that all too often prefers them to be slim, silent, and subservient.

Make Me Up follows Siri, who wakes to find herself trapped inside a brutalist candy-coloured dreamhouse. Despite the cutesy décor, the place is far from benign, and she and her fellow inmates are encouraged to compete for survival while being watched over by surveillance cameras. The film examines how television and social media can be fun and expressive spaces to explore identity, but simultaneously gilded prisons that encourage women to conform to strict beauty ideals.

The artist also revisits some early artistic influences, including BBC documentaries like Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*, from which the film samples dialogue. In making the film, Maclean reassessed her relationship to Clark's reading of art history - how strikingly present women are in images and sculptures, yet how absent they are as voices or agents in art production.

Make Me Up was premiered at the London Film Festival in October 2018. It has subsequently had a widespread cinema release, and was broadcast on the BBC in November 2018.



Video Outline



The above video addresses the research context of the project and the methodology and process behind it. It is an interview between Vonny LeClerc and Rachel Maclean and is not a video outline. A written transcription of this video is provided on page 13.

Make Me Up

View the gallery version of the film below



Make Me Up, 2018

Digital video

Duration: 45 mins

The output was originally commissioned by BBC, Creative Scotland, 14-18 Now, Hopscotch Films and NVA. The film premiered at the Adelaide Film Festival, Australia, in 2018 and has since been disseminated via a series of screenings and exhibitions around the world from 2018 to date. Further upcoming screenings are scheduled for 2021.

Details of the dissemination and impact of the project are covered in the information provided below.

NAME

SIRI

STATUS

?????

EYE | EYE |

MOUTH







Installation view of 'Make Me Up' at Zabłudowicz Collection, London, England, 2018.

Screenings & Exhibitions

- 2021 (Upcoming) *Make Me Up*, online digital screening programme and events, with The Jacob Lawrence Gallery, University of Washington and other venues TBC. USA
- 2021 (Upcoming) The Flying Broom Festival, Turkey
- 2021 BBC Scotland, UK
- 2020 The Flying Broom Festival, Turkey
- '*Make Me Up*' was awarded the International Federation of Film Critics award (FIPRESCI)
- 2020 Online screening with Vidéographe and Dazibao Montreal, Canada
- 2020 Festival du nouveau cinéma, Montreal, Canada
- 2019 Rachel Maclean: *Make Me Up*, Kunsthalle Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland
- 2019 Moscow International Experiment Film Festival, Russia
- 2019 Rotterdam Film Festival, The Netherlands
- 2018 BBC4 and BBC Scotland, and across selected UK cinemas
- 2018 Rachel Maclean: *Solo Exhibition*, Zabłudowicz Collection, London, England
- 2018 Manchester Film Weekender, Home, Manchester, England
- 2018 London Film Festival, London, England
- 2018 Adelaide Film Festival, Adelaide, Australia

Commissioned by BBC, Creative Scotland, 14-18 Now, Hopscotch Films and NVA.

Current distributor Antidote Films, for international screenings, festivals and video on demand.

Press / Public Response

"Make Me Up takes place in a seductive and dangerous place where surveillance, violence and submission are a normalised part of daily life. The film explores how the media, on one hand, can be a great way to express and explore identity. On the other hand, social media can be seen as a gilded prison that encourages women to conform to strict beauty ideals."

- Jyni Ong, It's Nice That

[Rachel Maclean's Make Me Up is a visually seductive film about female identity](#)

"Rachel Maclean packs an awful lot into just over an hour... The implication is clear: that art history is above all a male narrative and one, moreover, of violence and exploitation."

- Suzi Feay, Financial Times

[Make Me Up, BBC4: brilliantly incendiary feminist sci-fi by Rachel Maclean](#)

Press Links

[BFI](#)

[Dazed](#)

[The Economist](#)

[The Guardian](#)

[Huck Magazine](#)

[SYFY](#)

[The Skinny \(Interview\)](#)

[The Skinny \(Review\)](#)

Transcription of video outline

V: = Vonny Leclerc

R: = Rachel Maclean

V: I think that your work is so provocative and seeing it large and really in your face really drove that home and the thing that really stood out is this polished, really clean, really synthetic world that you've created. What draws you to that kind of world?

R: I was interested... I'm kind of interested in visually what's communicated immediately and I like the idea that seeing my work for the first time, just a frame of it, you get, like, Barbie, kind of Disney Princess and all these connotations that are really just quite immediate, but then you continue to watch the work and the content and what happens just introduces these darker, more critical elements into it. And I think I'm interested in criticising that aesthetic and where it comes from, this idea of little girls kind of dreaming to be princesses when they grow up.

But also, I'm interested in the challenge of saying, "Take this seriously." So instead of just looking at pink stuff and thinking, 'that's silly,

it's frivolous,' you look at it and you think, 'well I'm being challenged to take this seriously.' So I'm playing with both things, hopefully.

Something I've been thinking about in making the film is the kind of secret things that women, I guess, all experience, but it's not something that's necessarily externalised and I think food is one of those things where so many women - I would say almost all women - have some kind of anxiety around food. That's just this internalised level of control and I'm interested in externalising some of these private things that women experience, thinking about the kind of larger political environment that causes you to feel that way, rather than everything having to be about your own individualistic anxieties or problems.

In the film, you kind of start with this group of women and you're introduced to the idea that they're competing and they're part of a structured competition. And as the film goes on, it's almost like the camaraderie grows between them and I'm interested in that, the camaraderie between women and female friendships and the importance of that and almost overriding this sense that women are

trained to compete with each other for men or male attention.

V: The film made me think of a particular quote by John Berger about women in art being there to feed an appetite, not to have an appetite of our own. How do you think that art and particularly women's art can challenge our kind of default to cater to the male gaze?

R: Yes, I mean I think it's like a challenge as a female artist because so much of the control of women happens in visual media, and to try and pick that apart and deconstruct it is a complex thing, and I think partly making art is working through that, and I realise there's this complication where you don't want to abandon the things that seem like systems of control. So, you might say, "Make-up is a level of control," or you might say, "This princess, sort of, idealistic world is a level of control," and that would be true, but do you just abandon that and start dressing like a man or making work that looks male or do you complicate it and mess it up a bit?

I'm more in that sense of believing that there's something complicated that can come out of this, where the character in the film certainly

Transcription of video outline cont.

uses make-up as a way out, so she almost uses the thing that's controlling her as a way out. So, I think that there's... it's not black and white, there's other routes through it, and that's what you've got to grapple with as a female artist.