

Grzegorz Kubiński*

Dolls and Octopuses. The (In)human Sexuality of Mari Katayama

Abstract

Japan is very often seen as a country of ambiguities and contradictions. The latest technology meets tradition here. In the popular culture of the West, Japan is also perceived as a disturbingly sensual country. This article is an attempt to combine elements such as Western technology and eastern sexuality based on the work of contemporary artist Mari Katayama. A number of proposals are presented how to interpret Katayama's work as a reinterpretation of sociosexual and bodily as well as corporeal norms of the past and present, and of the West and of the East.

Keywords

Body, Disability, Social Media, Inhuman, Sexuality

Contemporary societies operating in global networks of dependencies allow for the continuous redefinition of identity. Global tendencies and particular interests overlap, which renders the landscape of social reality highly diverse. The use of new telecommunication technologies and social media makes the negotiation of the identity of an entity possible, a negotiation that takes place in relation to a wide spectrum of social aspects which go beyond ethnic and racial boundaries. Simultaneously, private and intimate issues such as corporeality and sexuality also go beyond the boundaries of intimacy, becoming part of a wider narrative. In this article, I would like to propose an attempt to interpret the mutual relationships between corporeality and sexuality in the context of the intercultural works of a Japanese artist

* Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology
Email: grzegorz.kubinski@up.krakow.pl

from a younger generation, Mari Katayama.¹ As a nearly thirty-year-old woman, she is not only an active creator, but also a participant and user of social media, which further intensifies her belonging to the contemporary global structure of reality. Katayama's works may be interpreted on many levels, but I suggest focusing on several elements that seem particularly interesting: technology, the body, and sexuality. These constitute a collection of media in her works, thanks to which she proposes a reinterpretation of the existing patriarchal and normative social standards.

The Incomplete Body

Katayama's body is not a normative body, which seems to be the most important element defining her art. She was born with a genetic condition called tibial hemimelia, a deficiency in which the major, larger bone of the lower leg is absent, which resulted in the amputation of her legs at the age of nine. In her art, Katayama engages in a dialogue with this very form of distinct corporeality—"ugly, obese, disabled, black, old, or simply unacceptable bodies of today" (Sturm 2014, 32). By her own admission, she made the conscious decision regarding the amputation when she was essentially still a child, faced with a choice between spending her life in a wheelchair and being dependent on others or having her legs amputated and using prostheses, which not only gave her a sense of independence, but would also become tools of her artistic expression later on. Thus, the artist's own body became her original medium of expression.

In one of her works, a photograph from 2014 entitled "you're mine #001," there are obvious clues used by the artist to negotiate the meanings between disability and having a different body, and social expectations that are not so much concerned with the body as such, but with the body of

¹ Mari Katayama (b. 1987) "born in Saitama and raised in Gunma, Japan. Graduated Tokyo University of the Arts after obtaining MFA in 2012. Suffering from congenital tibial hemimelia, Katayama had both legs amputated at age of 9. Since then, she has created numerous self-portrait photography together with embroidered objects and decorated prosthesis, using her own body as a living sculpture. Her belief is that tracing herself connects with other people and her everyday life can be also connected with the society and the world, just like the patchwork made with threads and a needle by stitching borders. In addition to her art creation, Katayama leads the 'High heel project' in which she wore customized high-heeled shoes specially made for prosthesis to perform on stage as a singer, model, or keynote speaker. The motto of this project is to take advantage of any means, including art and the disabled body, if it helps to expand the 'freedom of choice' for those in desperate need" (see: <http://shell-kashime.com/>). All discussed works and information about the artist can be found on the website <http://shell-kashime.com/> and <https://www.instagram.com/katayamari/>

a young woman in particular. "You're mine #001" is one of the many photographs/self-portraits created by Katayama, which may be treated as the most important form of her artistic expression. Since she works "with her" body, or even, works using "her" body, self-portrait photography seems to be a natural medium. The self-portrait "you're mine #001" shows Katayama dressed in a flesh-colored corset and underwear of the same color, on her legs she has stockings, one of which goes up to the hip, while the other goes halfway up the thigh, revealing a fragment of her naked body. The artist is lying on a few white pillows, supported on her right hand bent at the elbow; her left hand rests loosely along the body. The whole scene focuses on the figure of the model located in the center of the frame; a white, draped material serves as the background. This very simple composition carries with it meanings that are important for multiple interpretations. However, it seems that the artist's intention of sexualizing her own body is predominant here. By lying on pillows with her body curved in a delicate and sensual way, Katayama presents herself in the pose of a seductress. Her face is covered with heavy make-up which clearly highlights her eyes and blood-red lips. The contour of her face is emphasized by jet-black hair cut short. The sensuality, or even sexuality, of the Japanese artist's figure is emphasized by adopting many images from film stills, classical paintings and erotic materials of the pink industry, which are all used in a conscious manner.

The photograph, however, does not stun the viewer with vulgar sexuality or a pornographic close-up. Katayama presents herself as a study of a subtly stylized, very beautiful young woman in a very tasteful manner. At the same time, the presented body causes uneasiness in the target audience—Mari Katayama has no legs. What the viewer may initially interpret as stockings turn out to be medical compression bands, which become a paradoxical object. On the one hand they introduce a sense of erotic excitement, especially the band which runs halfway up the thigh, like a classic woman's stocking used in combination with garters. On the other hand, once the recipient realizes what these "stockings" really are, the feeling of anxiety and uneasiness arises. The artist's position, her provocative glance and her head tilted back, as well as the background of the photograph which evokes associations related to a boudoir, practically force the viewer to sexualize the depicted body. It seems, however, that one of the possible interpretational clues in this case would be the assumption that it is not only the artist's body that is the subject of the gaze, but also these very "stockings"—compression bands which become a liminal object or Winnicott's transitional object which differentiates "disability and monstrosity" as Michel Foucault depicted as follows:

The difference between disability and monstrosity is revealed at the meeting point, the point of friction, between a breach of the natural law-table and the breach of the law instituted by God or by society, at the point where these two breaches of law come together. Disability may well be something that upsets the natural order, but disability is not monstrosity because it has a place in civil or canon law. The disabled person may not conform to nature, but the law in some way provides for him. Monstrosity, however, is the kind of natural irregularity that calls law into question and disables it (2003, 64).

Medical compression bands work as “stockings” making an uncomfortable, but seductive ambivalence between Katayama’s “failed body” (Sturm 2014, 23) and the composition of the exposed, sensual body. At the same time, this little detail indicates the clear separation between disability and “monstrosity,” excluding Katayama’s body from the realm of the monstrosity and placing it into the space of marginalized but still human and socially inherent bodies.

At this point it is worth mentioning that this young female artist is an active participant in the world of social media, she has her own website and accounts on all the major websites such as Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook.² Seeing this type of photo on Instagram, the recipient may feel uncomfortable, because how can you show such pictures on Instagram, a place designed for the creation of an ideal reality? Is the use of this kind of medium something socially acceptable?

By mostly uniting women, in this case it seems that Katayama fits perfectly into the body positivity movement, which postulates the acceptance and even the affirmation of all physical differences.³ In social-media such as Instagram, which operate by using primarily images, an abundance of profiles belonging to disabled people may be found: people who are not artists but present different parts of their body. Moreover, in this online space there are many profiles of women with disabilities who use sexuality as a tool for expressing their identity or making people grow accustomed to otherness. I suggest considering the expression of sexuality or the indication of a different body that is sexually ready and open as one of the leading strategies

² Mari Katayama’s website presenting her artistic activity: <http://shell-kashime.com/> and more personal, but also open for the interested people Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/katayamari/>

³ The positive body movement promotes unacceptable and socially marginalized bodies. These include, but are not limited to, photos of the bodies of disabled people, people with physical differences or visible illnesses. A positive body community flourishes mainly on social media like Facebook and Instagram. See: Bell, Cassarly, Dunbar 2018; Lupton 2016.

in familiarizing people with the “different conceptions of the erotic body” (Siebers 2011, 148-149, 160), especially women with disabilities.⁴ Throughout the culture, “women with disabilities traditionally have been ignored not only by those concerned about disability but also by those examining women’s experiences” and “the popular view of women with disabilities has been one mixed with repugnance, and they were perceived also as highly “passive and doll-like” (Asch, Fine 1988, 17). Katayama’s works show how this kind of “doll-like” passivity can be used to show and express the opposite side of disabled women’s bodies—sexuality and sensuality. When asked about the subject of her works, Mari Katayama answered, “The theme depends on what I feel for the moment. Because I believe being an artist is a job for those who live in the era they’re in. I feel like I respond to the currents or trends to create something that fits in this era” (Ogura, Lo 2017). She made it clear that despite its aesthetic qualities, her art is also socially engaged art. The physicality of Katayama’s non-normative body is therefore political when she shows “the body in all its purity, in its idiosyncratic deformations, and in its appealing rawness” and as she herself said, “[o]ne thing I know for sure is that beauty is not something good-looking or clean. I personally feel that anything that is alive is beautiful [...] I do not intend to create something beautiful in the first place” (Heron-Langton 2018). Using art and new media like Instagram, Katayama and many other women with disabilities use their sexuality as a tactic for the full expression of their femininity. On Instagram there are many profiles and pictures of women with disabilities expressing themselves in a very seductive and sexual way, exactly the same way, we can observe when looking at the “normal” female body.

For example, women with rare diseases, after amputation procedures, suffering from rare skin conditions or other skin lesions, women with an ostomy, burn victims, or finally the many women who are struggling with stretch marks, cellulite or obesity; they all showcase their bodies. At the same time, they supplement these images with descriptions such as “perfectly imperfect,” “flawless affect,” or “underneath we are women” as if to indicate the twofold nature of physical otherness. A random genetic illness or an accident appears as an undesirable element which, after some time, becomes an integral part of the identity of a given individual, and often this identity does not exist without this “defect” (Nussbaum 2000, 35-36).

⁴ Tobin Siebers proposed “a sexual culture” of disability based on “representing disability not as a defect but complex embodiment that enhances sexual activities.” In this conception of sexuality, mainly the sexuality of disabled bodies, it was perceived as “a political dimension that redefines people with disabilities as sexual citizens.” I assume this kind of thinking is strongly present in the Katayama’s works.

Katayama perfectly reflects the fundamental principles of this type of behavior creating and strengthening femininity against the conviction that disabilities (but also physical impairments) defeminize because “disabled women supposedly have no reason to reproduce and no reason to have sex” (Siebers 2011, 131). Disability becomes not only “beautiful,” but also sexy and sensual (McGlensey 2014). The compression bands that replace stockings direct the recipient’s attention not only towards the absent legs, a culturally accepted and desirable element of feminine sexuality, but also towards an uncomfortable question regarding her self-provocative act of sexual arousal itself. The absence of legs—the left one from the knee down and the right one from the ankle down—may trigger visual discomfort caused by looking at an ill person, or at a person who is a “cripple,” or more broadly, someone who should not be looked at “in this way.” In this case, the phrase “in this way” is a synonym of “these things” about which one shouldn’t speak out loud—sex, erotic desires, forbidden fantasies and sexual fetishes.

A society in the process of socialization passes normative behaviors onto its members in a very precise manner, including ways of looking at things or individuals. Jacques Rancière pointed out that the part of the body which one cannot look at seems to be the most interesting, and it is in this very place where we may encounter symbolic power which seems to say ‘disperse, there is nothing to see here!’ It is an order—an interpellation—from the authority to the crowd attracted by an unusual sight (Rancière 2007, 157). This order is extremely difficult to obey today, because individuals, as in the case of Katayama and women and men associated with the body positivity movement, consciously and consistently place themselves in the center of the online spectacle. The recipient, however, who is not accustomed to physical otherness, becomes not only a spectator, but a gawker and a voyeurist who does not look with their eyes wide open but stares—subconsciously and even instinctively—at the curiosity that has appeared before them. Katayama does not expose this staring in the context of otherness and sexuality as much as she juxtaposes both these dimensions against one another, thus making staring aesthetically legitimate, though morally equivocal. By means of subtle ambivalence represented by the replacement of stockings with medical accessories she establishes a space in which the viewer asks themselves not about the sexual value of the model but rather about their own sexuality and their own desires that he or she begins to fear. That is because, as much as a disabled or, to put it more aptly, a “crippled” woman who poses in negligee without her legs is indeed part of a certain artistic convention and the viewer is able to accept it to some degree. One may simply recall the armless and yet canonical Venus de Milo or the Three Goddesses from

the Parthenon. Simultaneously, the introduction of sexuality cannot remain unanswered. The problem, however, is that the answer cannot be given because, once it is given, the viewer gawking at Katayama will inscribe themselves into the context in which, until now, they have been situating the artist, into the space of otherness. That is because she presents herself in this space in a conscious manner. It remains unanswered whether the beginning of this lies in her having been bullied by her peers as a schoolgirl, or whether she was deprived of her sense of femininity at an incident during one of her singing performances, when a man's voice from the audience pointed out to her that, since she did not have her heels on (because she was wearing her prostheses), she was "not a real woman" (Katayama 2015).⁵

All of these experiences have probably become the canvas for her artistic activities, among which "you're mine #001" is one of the most expressive depictions. In the words of Elizabeth Grosz, an individual who is a freak "is thus neither unusually gifted nor unusually disadvantaged. He or she is not an object of a simple admiration or pity but is a being who is considered simultaneously and compulsively fascinating and repulsive, enticing and sickening" (1996, 56). Freakiness it is not the lack of a limb or an unusual limb, but functioning in-between worlds, in-between realities overlapping in an ambivalent and inadmissible manner. This is why the physical otherness of Katayama as something that is enforced on the viewer does not lead to anxiety in and of itself. What is responsible is "the moment, the point which now belongs to the anticipatory structure of every aesthetic project" (Bohrer 2005, 98) which is the sudden recognition of the discontinuity of reality and its mismatched nature. Katayama's work does not indicate that the viewer is

⁵ Katayama, in her artistic project entitled "High Heel Project" (2011), focuses on the material aspect of the combination of her femininity, sexuality and disability. Looking for appropriate prostheses, the artist decided that they should not only be practical but that they should also express femininity through the possibility of them having high heels. This was not only a practical act, but also an expression of Katayama's feminine agency in this case through the ability to choose to wear whatever outfit/fashion she would like. As the artist said, "As I proceed the project to achieve my goal, I found what prosthesis users face. Users lack chance to choose, not only to choose high-heels, but also to choose to wear sandals, skirts, jackets... People don't even know that they can choose." By choosing the appropriate prosthesis to emphasize femininity and be an expression of her active construction of her own identity as a woman, Katayama gained the ability to freely dispose of her body and felt more accepted. As she said, "Regardless of how much I love fashion, I couldn't wear high heels. Leggings and skinny pants are cool because they show line of the body. If I wore them, they seemed uncool, because it was somehow unnatural. Maybe an emotion that I unknowingly suppressed was being released. Anyway, I think I wanted to express myself badly" (see: Ito 2012).

only and solely a gawker, some mindless participant in a mass performance in P.T. Barnum's "circus of curiosities," but that they are a lusty gawker and, at the same time, terrified by their desire. The sexualization of these types of bodies, which are a kind of glitch on the surface of culture, is much more important than the mere exposure of a physical defect.

As Elizabeth Grosz pointed out, it is the "simultaneity" of disgust and fascination that creates a space of otherness, but this simultaneity appearing in the sudden Now points to something much more disturbing, namely that "it is not gross deformity alone that is so unsettling and fascinating. Rather, there are other reasons for his curiosity and horror. It seems to me that the initial reaction to the freakish and the monstrous is a perverse kind of sexual curiosity. People think to themselves: 'How do they do it?' (Grosz 1996, 64). By interpreting Grosz's statement slightly differently, one may say that while looking at Katayama's work the viewer does not ask "how do they do it?" but rather "do I want to do it?" or, realizing that what they took for sexy garters is a medical item, they ask themselves "why does this excite me?", and finally "what is it that really turns me on?". The artist does not trifle with the recipient by using a sophisticated *trompe-l'œil*. Her presentation of both her incomplete body and feminine accessories is rather an anamorphosis than a simulation. It does not require the recipient to suspend the reality, nor does it introduce them into an unreal world. On the contrary, this clash with the actual reality at the moment of an anamorphic transformation of the garters into bandages triggers a sudden anxiety. Here, the photo acts like an aphrodisiac but, at the same time, it is not quite clear what the aphrodisiac is—whether it is the shape of the body that arouses, the lack of a leg, the lack of a foot, the blood-red lips or the stumps dressed in medical garments. What is more, the appropriative and dominant title of the work—"you're mine #001"—together with her assertive attitude as the model suggests that it is she who is the dominant party, she is the one who gives pleasure, and it is her sexuality that is to be satisfied. Katayama's otherness becomes a source of power and a space of untamed libidinal strength, combining the issues of femininity, sexuality and the non-normative nature of her corporeality, treated in the culture as ambivalently dangerous and desirable, and thus marginalized.

The Inhuman Body

Despite her Asian origins, Mari Katayama proposes an exhibition of a disabled body which may be analyzed by using interpretative clues that belong to Western culture. This type of inclination may also be found in her other

works, including one of her most famous, entitled “bystander #016” from 2016. The photograph, another self-portrait, depicts the artist lying on the beach on Naoshima Island, surrounded from her waist down with stuffed appendages, tentacles sewn from a bluish grey material resembling the limbs of cephalopods or deformed human arms. This work also contains a multitude of autobiographical threads—starting from her skill in sewing and crocheting that her grandmother and mother taught her. This emphasizes the significance of the idea of matriarchy by referring to amputated legs, the stumps of which are visible between the artificial limbs, and by finishing with an analogy to the artist’s left palm, deformed as a result of an illness.⁶ In the context of Western art, this work was intended to refer to Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*, however its center is occupied not by classical beauty, but precisely by a different, object body. Nevertheless, attention should be given to a slightly different way of interpreting “bystander #016” as in the case of “you’re mine #001,”—a focusing on the aspect of sexuality which connects both the works. While sexuality does not appear to come to the fore in the work “bystander #016,” it still seems to be strongly present there.

Katayama suggests an interpretative clue, that the creative process was strongly inspired by the Japanese puppet theatre, in which the dolls moved by men directing their movements. One might seek the dialogical role of Katayama’s art in this aspect alone, exhibiting a non-normative body not only as a new canon of beauty appearing in the bystander’s center of attention, but also as a challenge to the patriarchal order of art, society, body, and sexuality. However, the artist drew attention to the peculiar form of *burnaku*—the Naoshima Onna Burnaku theatre, an all-female style of traditional puppet theatre. Such a way of presenting the narrative by using dolls where femininity is most strongly emphasized. In the context of these works, it is also important to recall that *bunraku* dolls have no legs. To be more exact, their legs are hidden and male actors direct the dolls in such a way as to express emotion by only using their upper bodies, faces and hands. In this context, “bystander #016” represents the liminal, hybrid character of a trickster, connecting not only the world of the East and the West, but also masculinity and femininity, power and submissiveness, and finally, sexuality and its necessary element suggested by Grosz, i.e. repulsive curiosity. Sitting on a beach with her legs spread out, Katayama attracts the gaze as an absolute Other, inhuman, half-animal shape that is appealing and fascinating, that simultaneously repulses with its otherness. Still, and this is where the artist’s

⁶ Katayama devotes other works and the book “The Gift” to this.

attire in the form of a feminine lacy petticoat comes into play once more, the viewer is not allowed to shake off the pesky question as to the sexuality of this “object.”

In order to further underline the expression of “bystander #016,” we may point to the tradition of Japanese *ukiyo-e* drawings, a term which literally means “floating worlds,” mainly depicting scenes from the Edo and Meiji periods. Katayama refers to this Japanese art tradition with particular emphasis on the *shunga* genre which “means ‘spring pictures,’ embrace all erotic imagery, including prints, books and scrolls. In its specific usage, *shunga* comprise one of six genres in woodblock prints of the Edo and Meiji periods” (Singer 1999, 381). Paintings and engravings of this type depict erotic scenes, often exaggerated and humorous. When interpreting Katayama’s works, one should take into account perhaps one of the most famous works “The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife” (1814) by Katsushika Hokusai (Uhlenbeck, Winkel 2005, 161). It depicts a young woman lying on a beach in an ecstatic, sensual pose, to whose womb and lips there adhere two octopuses which entangle the entire figure with their tentacles. Setting aside the story which serves as the painting’s canvas, the analogy between *shunga* and Katayama’s works seems to be enticing. Here, sexuality is depicted as the embodiment of feminine pleasure, but also as a lustful feminine body, crossing the boundaries set by social norms and patriarchal prohibitions in its quest for pleasure. Secluded places such as beaches or bays might simultaneously act as symbols of women’s marginalization. Also the often forbidden sensual pleasure, which brings to mind the Western social ostracism regarding masturbation in relation to women as well, as an activity in which one indulges in furtively and on their own. Hokusai’s *shunga* and Katayama’s work show that this eternal sexualization of the female body has, in fact, been created both by Western and Eastern culture, marginalizing a woman, the absolute Other, namely a being that is dangerous in its sexual otherness.

But in addition, the female body does not have to satisfy the normative desires of the male gaze, but can present itself as sexually significant in its totality, including disabled, corporeal otherness. The absolute and disturbing otherness of female sexuality is also emphasized by the physical, sexual contact with non-human beings forming a community described, for instance, by Donna Haraway, so different in its essence from the patriarchal and rational or even scientific proposal of Bruno Latour.⁷ As Haraway said: “I re-

⁷ Bruno Latour’s “action-network theory” known as ANT, proposes to include in the study of society not only human subjects but also material and immaterial objects. According to this concept, material and immaterial objects also have agency, an agency which has

member that tentacle comes from the Latin *tentaculum*, meaning ‘feeler’, and *tentare*, meaning ‘to feel’ and ‘to try’; [...] the tentacular ones make attachments and detachments; they are both open and knotted in some ways and not others” (Haraway 2016, 31). Haraway and the work of Katayama definitely point to a more amorphous, corporeal, and above all, intimate relationship with non-human actors, while the indications of Latour, emphasizing a network of connections of non-living things, primarily operate on the level—one might say—of male rationality.

Katayama’s works refer to an ambiguous and liminal space, the baroque grotesque in which sexuality mixed with imperfect corporeality causes uncanny anxiety in the viewer with regard to their own sense of lust and fetishistic desires. It seems, however, that in the photographs discussed here, one may discover not only the chaotic fluctuations of the libidinal Real, but also the state of being static and in total submissiveness. Katayama’s work seems to confirm the intuition that a sense of repulsion withdrawn at the right moment in order to experience pleasure is essential in sexual ecstasy. Simultaneously, this feeling of aversion changes an entity into an object, which makes sexual pleasure possible to begin with. Making a sexual partner cease, even but for a moment, to be a human being, an active entity seems to be necessary for “these things” to happen. Forbidden and taboo sexual actions cannot be performed on or with an subject, you cannot crave a person as such in an animated and uncontrolled way, they should be turned into an object for a moment, literally made an object of pleasure around which lust is centered. This certain dose of dehumanization is necessary for the transformation of a human into a non-human, even if it is embarrassing or to be hidden, to satisfy the curiosity related to the question of “how do they do it?”.

The Incomplete Doll-Like Body

Such a suggestion for the interpretation of Katayama’s works may be confirmed in the works discussed above, once their static, dehumanizing aspect is exposed. It is not about simply indicating the connection between the animalistic *shunga* emphasizing non-human sexuality. Works by both Hokusai and Katayama also pay attention to the body treated as an ambivalent, inanimate object—a doll. In the Japanese tradition, a doll is not just a toy because it functions in the space of culture permeated with animism, it functions as a mediator between the worlds of what is real and fictitious, ani-

a real influence on human actions. In the context of the above, such non-human actors naturally also include animals. See: Latour 2007.

mated and inanimate. Without analyzing all the types of dolls and their role in Japanese culture, it is still worth paying attention to two types. One is the life-like doll called *iki-ningyō*, whose similarity to living people is striking. The other is those dolls thematically related to erotica, e.g. *shunga ningyo* and life-size ones, used for satisfying sexual pleasure called *shutsuro bijin* (“travelling beauties”) or *kōshoku onna* (“play women”), which are equivalent to the European *les dames de voyage* used by sailors during long cruises as substitutes for absent women (Pate 2008, 514).

The rich history of erotic prints and Japanese dolls has had a very strong influence on Western pop culture at least since the later part of the twentieth century. It is enough to mention the *anime* or *manga* genres, but also real dolls present in the West, that is, life-size sex dolls often very clearly stylized to resemble Japanese or, speaking more broadly, Asian women, although not only⁸. The gradually growing number of men who possess such quasi-human objects is quite visible in social media. For example, on Instagram, a medium Katayama uses, one can find many profiles of men sharing photos of their artificial “friends.” Not always, or rather, relatively rarely, are these pornographic or highly erotic pictures, but one can see many photographs in which dolls appear in roles sanctioned by patriarchy known from everyday life—cleaning, cooking as well as some more intimate ones—walking or eating together. In the work of Mari Katayama, it is possible to see the connections between her works as well as her presence and role of dolls in the sexual life of Japan and Western countries. In “you’re mine #001” discussed above, not only does the artist adopt a sensual pose, but the whole picture is extremely sterile and precise. The simple but classic and precise make-up and the positioning of her body is reminiscent of a shop mannequin or just a doll that may be interpreted as the other side of femininity—captured in a stereotypical, patriarchal and heteronormative context—as completely

⁸ It should be noted that sex-dolls have different forms. They are produced in a wide range of shapes and sizes, taking into account the preferences of customers. Companies such as Abyss Creation or 4Woods offer fully personalized sex-dolls, but in this text I only note their similarity to Japanese (pop)culture. Katayama’s works may evoke associations with other dolls from Japanese culture like *kyūtai kansetsu ningyō*, presented also in Poland by Monika Mostowik-Wanat. However, in this article I have decided that the main point of reference for the interpretation of Katayama’s works would be the European, Western perspective on her works. The proposed interpretation assumes that contemporary Western European culture is very strongly sexually oriented, but at the same time sex-doll-related motifs appear in it more and more often (e.g. the series *Humans* or *Better than Us*). Hence the attempt to combine a Western view with Japanese contemporary art in the context of sexuality and femininity, including a doll as a subject-object of sexuality.

objectified and submissive. The disabled body also fits this context well, pointing to a doll that is “faulty” and “broken,” but still fit for “use.”

The static and sterile nature of the photograph may simultaneously be interpreted as a metaphor of an intimate, forbidden space where these “things” take place, and because no one has access to it, the object of pleasure may not only be non-human but also “damaged.” In this case, it should be emphasized that Katayama puts the viewer on the side of the male gaze and it is precisely to him that the title “you’re mine” now refers, indicating the appropriation of a female, completely submissive, and vulnerable body. “Bystander #016” may be interpreted in a similar way, where it is indeed a man who is the dominant actor who is looking or, to put it more aptly, gawking at this strange being, unable to escape and worryingly sensual, thrown out onto the shore by the sea, a being which one may move as they please—just as in the case of the legless *bunraku* dolls. In her other works, Katayama summarizes the ways of interpreting suggested above. In the photograph entitled “Shell” from 2016, we see the artist, again as a model, sitting in a large, richly decorated chair in nothing more than her underwear, exhibiting her incomplete body, with her prostheses lying next to her. The entire space around the central figure is filled with a wide range of different small trinkets of everyday use.

Here, Katayama, akin to a large doll, sits in a beautiful chair amidst various baubles and shimmering knick-knacks that are gifted to her, supposed to complement her incomplete body, and which, in effect, become a golden cage or shell which surrounds the artist’s body, unique like a pearl. Katayama has said, “I don’t think I have learned to use my body. I use my body as material simply because it’s handy” (Ogura, Lo 2017). She uses her body as a certain form of object, just as in Heidegger’s “handiness” of the body. By situating herself, her body, among many objects, often intimate and at the same time ordinary, she inscribes herself in this commonplace routine. Katayama’s works, despite their austere style, are at the same time rich in detail and contain a large number of everyday objects. This everyday life is juxtaposed with an oversized, clearly exposed body, which remains in the ambiguous position of being both a subject and an object.

The artist’s work seems to explore this very space in-between intimacy and indifference, looking for a way to present her femininity through non-normative corporeality using traditional and contemporary means of artistic expression. Treatment of the body as an object, handy, but at the same time in a way “incomplete” and non-human is very clearly present in her works. In this analysis, it is after all mannequins and hand-sewn life-size dolls that are important elements of the artist’s work.

Conclusions

The photographs discussed here are not the only ones in which Katayama's body is transformed into an object, in this case a doll, an object of sexual desire, as "Katayama has referred to treating her body as a mannequin" (Elephant Art 2019). Of course, one can find works that address these topics in a more literal way, such as "Mirror" (2013), "you're mine #000" (2014), "This I Exist-Doll" (2015), the sculpture "Dolls" and "Dolls and Boxes" (2018) dominated by perception of the "body as a living sculpture that allows her to tackle themes of identity" (Battista 2019). Not only do all these works show the interchangeable use of the human body and the anthropomorphic doll, but also the doubling of the human body by the introduction of this inanimate object.

However, the selection of these photographs was a quite conscious one, because it seems that hiding within them are many possible meanings Katayama explores, such as sexuality, femininity and otherness. The utility of the body-object-doll is combined with the sensuality of the female body visible in the works presented here, which are extraordinarily intimate, feminine portraits. Femininity, despite its sexuality and sensuality, resides between desire and rejection, just like a liminal object, a doll. The former curator of the Tate Modern Museum, describing Katayama's works, said,

I first saw Mari Katayama's photos at the Unseen Amsterdam photo festival. I was there with some of my colleagues at Tate that are here with us today as well, and to me Mari's works looked just different from any other photographs that I had seen before. That's not because she is Japanese. It's on a completely different level. I think I felt that way because the photographic worlds she creates are so unique. And as we have all witnessed today, Mari's photographs have a rare kind of communicative ability. With the "voice" of photography that she has made her own, I guess she will easily surmount the differences between Eastern and Western cultures (Ida 2019).

Perhaps it is precisely this combination of elements that are so culturally saturated with senses and meanings such as lacquer, a "failed body," femininity and sexuality that makes the works of the young artist universal, combining elements of equal cultures.

The works by Mari Katayama discussed here present only a fragment of her rich output. However, the works presented in this article seem to be the closest to the interpretation suggested, i.e. showing how a non-normative body can serve as a medium not only to express the experience of physical otherness. What has been emphasized in the proposed interpretation is the

relation between physical difference and feminine sexuality in the context of a particular style. On the one hand, this style was developed by Katayama as a way of expressing emotions personally, on the other hand, it is inscribed in the language of Western pop-culture sexuality. Katayama presents herself in a series of self-portraits not only in her traditional, Far Eastern femininity acquired from home, where her mother and grandmother were reference points for her. And yet, this safe space of home is juxtaposed with the physical difference of the artist's body. She shows herself through her body, classifying it as a peculiar object, a doll that can be seen as well as possessed. It remains to the viewer's sensitivity to decide how to treat such an ambiguous body, whether in a familiar way, provoking sexual feelings, or as sensual, yet completely unknown and alien. The anxiety provoked by the artist's works is the tension between the intimate safety of traditional femininity and the cold, distant and empty sexuality of a body-doll treated as an object of desire.

Bibliography

1. Asch Adrienne, Fine Michelle (1988), "Introduction: Beyond Pedestals", [in:] Robert McRuer *et al.* (ed.), *Sex and Disability*, Durham-London: Duke University Press, pp. 37-53.
2. Battista Anna (2019), "No Broken Bodies, Just Beautiful Bodies: Mari Katayama @ The 58th International Art Exhibition, Venice", [online] https://www.irenebrination.com/irenebrination_notes_on_a/2019/06/mari-katayama-venice-biennale.html [accessed: 18.11.2019].
3. Bell Beth T., Cassarly Jennifer A., Dunbar Lucy (2018), "Selfie-Objectification: Self Objectification and Positive Feedback ("Likes") are Associated with Frequency of Posting Sexually Objectifying Self-Images on Social Media", *Body Image*, 26; pp. 83-89, DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.06.005.
4. Bohrer Karl (2005), *Nagłość. Chwila estetycznego pozoru*, tłum. Krystyna Krzemieniowa, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
5. Elephant Art (2019), "Mari Katayama celebrates the body beautiful Mari Katayama celebrates the body beautiful", [online] <https://elephant.art/mari-katayama-celebrates-the-body-beautiful/> [accessed: 19.11.2019].
6. Foucault Michel (2004), *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, New York: Picador.
7. Grosz Elizabeth (1996), "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit", [in:] Rosemarie Garland Thomson (ed.) *Freakery. Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, New York: New York University Press, pp. 55-68.
8. Haraway Donna J. (2016), *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham-London: Duke University Press.

9. Heron-Langton Jessica (2018), "How One Artist Used Photography to Come to Terms with Her Disability", [online] <https://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/body/article/42153/1/mari-katayama-photography-disability> [accessed: 19.11.2019].
10. Iida Mami (2019), "Mari Katayama 'Broken Heart'. Talk session with Simon Baker", [online] <https://www.realtokyo.co.jp/en/interview/mari-katayamabroken-heart-white-rainbow-2019-1-24-3-2/> [accessed: 19.11.2019].
11. Ito Hitomi (2012), "Choosing High Heels with Amputated Legs / Artist, Mari Katayama", [online] <http://www.fragmentsmag.com/en/2012/06/interview-katayama-mari/> [accessed: 20.11.2019].
12. Katayama Mari (2015), "My Way of Conveying Feelings Beyond Words", [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sESC5HKI4w4> [accessed: 19.11.2019].
13. Katayama Mari (2019a), [online] <http://shell-kashime.com/> [accessed: 19.11.2019].
14. Katayama Mari (2019b), [online] <https://www.instagram.com/katayamari/> [accessed: 19.11.2019].
15. Latour Bruno (2007), *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
16. Lupton Deborah (2016), "Digital Media and Body Weight, Shape, and Size: An Introduction and Review", *Fat Studies*, 6:2, pp. 119-134, DOI: 10.1080/21604851.2017.1243392.
17. McGlensy Melissa (2014), "Supermodel With Rare Skin Disease Proves Different is Beautiful", [online] <https://themighty.com/2014/09/super-model-with-rare-skin-disease-proves-different-is-beautiful/> [accessed: 18.11.2019].
18. Nussbaum Felicity (2000), "Dumb Virgins, Blind Ladies, and Eunuchs: Fictions of Defect", [in:] H. Deutsch *et al.* (eds.), *"Defects": Engendering the Modern Body*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, pp. 31-53.
19. Ogura Junko, Lo Andrea (2017), "Sewn Limbs and Surreal Backdrops in the Art of Mari Katayama", [online] <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/mari-katayama-self-portrait/index.html> [accessed: 20.11.2019].
20. Pate Allan (2005), *Japanese Dolls. The Fascinating World of Ningyo*, Singapore: Tuttle.
21. Pate Allan (2008), *Ningyo. The Art. Of the Japanese Doll*, Singapore: Tuttle.
22. Ranciere Jacques (2007), *Estetyka jako polityka*, tłum. Julian Kutyla, Paweł Mościcki, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej.
23. Siebers Tobin (2011), *Disability Theory*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
24. Siebers Tobin (2012), "A Sexual Culture of Disabled People", [in:] Robert McRuer *et al.* (eds.) *Sex and Disability*, Durham-London: Duke University Press, pp. 37-53.
25. Singer Robert (1999), *Edo: Art in Japan 1615-1868*, Washington: National Gallery of Art.
26. Sturm Jules (2014), *Bodies We Fail: Productive Embodiments of Imperfection*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
27. Uhlenbeck Chris, Winkel Margarita (2005), *Japanese Erotic Fantasies. Sexual Imagery of the Edo Period*, Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing.