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The Art Model as Performer

Author
Aurélie Debaene

Affiliation
University of Kent

Abstract: In this paper, I argue that modelling occupies a curious but underappreciated role in art making, warranting a hybrid art status. Modelling is intriguingly under-researched in aesthetics, despite its being a cornerstone of art education as well as deeply involved in various art practices. It functions both within a supportive role to further the goals of art making, while also retaining the creative agency and performance of the professional model upon whom the artist relies. I first discuss why modelling has been neglected as an area of research. Second, I frame the act of posing in terms of expert movement, improvisation and style, to understand the salient performative qualities of modelling. Third, I reflect on how modelling corresponds to creativity and skill. Fourth, I propose that modelling should be given due recognition as a hybrid collaborative art form that incorporates qualities of various performing arts like dance and acting. Finally, I conclude that the model can be considered a performer.

I. ON PHILOSOPHY AND MODELLING

There is no comprehensive account of art models and their *modus operandi* within contemporary aesthetics. The immediate challenge to a philosophical understanding of modelling, as it has been for art historical accounts, is a distinct lack of archival evidence and subsequent insights into what goes on within the studio. Our century; however, has witnessed a proliferation of autobiographies and accounts in which models speak out about their work, whether they be life models or other kinds of photographic models.[1] Questions that have been missed comprise: pinpointing the nature of posing, the impact models have on the act of art making, the medium in which they collaborate and models' involvement in the artwork's reception.[2]

To my mind, the root of this negligence is a perceived lack of skill attributed to models. Models who are considered neither skilled nor creative workers have remained side-lined within aesthetic scholarship. The 2020 BBC documentary *Titian – Behind Closed Doors* touches upon the archival problem that plagues models, namely the lack of material objects or documents that could illuminate how models were used or who they were. The documentary also implicitly highlights an assumption one might take with regards to models. In response to the notion that we will likely never know precisely whom Titian used as models and how he handled them, the art historian Charles Hope voices that:

> We don't know, is the answer. And I don't think anybody will. And I don't think it should particularly change our views about pictures either. What people do in the privacy of their own studios is their affair.[3]

Hope's dismissal of models as belonging to the privacy of the artist and his/her studio and thus having no bearing on our understanding of pictures is misguided and symptomatic of broader views on models' inconsequentiality. While some art historical[4] and social sciences[5] accounts of models exist, these understandably remain respectively focused on a particular geography, time and type of model, or the capitalist challenges in the fashion industry. Art philosophical accounts of models remain non-existent. Aesthetics ought to be curious about an ontology of modelling and how it interacts with a variety of artistic media, especially if it is concerned about artistic practices, their resulting artwork, and appreciation.

One area within which it becomes apparent how the added knowledge alters our viewing experience and understanding of images is the recent interest in naming pieces that were previously conceived of as mere types. One example is the 2019 exhibition 'Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today', which opened at the Wallach Art Gallery before travelling to Musée d'Orsay as 'Le modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse'. This exhibition, which explored the black figure as central within modern art, enabled spectators to assess various models' interactions with and influences on painters, sculptors and photographers in light of archival photographs, correspondence and films.[6] Where archival findings allow, the curators chose to alter image titles to reflect known models' names, rather than referring to objects by titles granted them over time. Another instance of this is the portrait by Simon Maris which was formerly called either *East Indian Type* or *Little Negress* (1906). Research into the artist's archive revealed the young girls' name, inspiring the Rijksmuseum to retitle the painting *Isabella*.[7] Its earlier titles added a typological dimension that cast the sitter as a misattributed, racialised type, rather than the individual who informs this piece. The altered title invites the viewer to behold the depicted girl differently.

Key to artists' intentions upon creating an image is their critical relation to previous imagery and the cultural circumstances within which they are social beings who continuously re-formulate picture making.[8] That information gathered regarding artists' practices informs our analyses of their images is exemplified not least by discussions of artists' intentionality and the meaning of their artworks. We should therefore take a keen interest in the way models too partner in art making in order to achieve a revaluation of the model's role in the production and reception of art. This piece will open the discussion about modelling as a creative practice by considering expert models who are 'posing professionals', steering this thinking towards considering modelling a hybrid art form. The aim is to demonstrate how modelling presents a worthwhile, exciting area of inquiry within aesthetics which invites further discussion.

As a means of initiating this discussion about modelling, this paper will explore the model as a skilled performer who warrants scholarly attention. To construct a first understanding of the salient qualities of modelling, I will first push back against assumptions that models are not skilled. This is then followed by an exploration of the relation between expert movement, improvisation and style. Second, I make the case that modelling is, moreover, a creative practice. I explore modelling, in its various forms and contexts, as a practice that unites a set of qualities and activity of posing within the format and regulations of, for instance, art education or the fashion studio. My main claim is that in their capacity as skilled body-experts, models can embed ingenuity within their modelling and contribute creatively to the artists and medium with whom they collaborate. Finally, I present modelling as a hybrid art that entails performative qualities found in dance and acting. These factors have only heightened during the pandemic, as models have taken control of their online posing, enabling some to become performers in their own right.

II. SALIENT QUALITIES OF MODELLING

The very first move to make when arguing for modelling as a skilled practice is to clarify modelling as an active practice. Before expert movement can even be discussed, the perception that the model is passive, like an inert still-life object, needs to be challenged. Such commonplace views, which are at the root of assumptions such as Hope's delegating models to the artist's private life, fail to influence our understanding of artworks.

In characterising models as either instruments or objects, former fashion model and sociologist Ashley Mears disempowers them. She argues that an instrument *does* work whereas an object is worked upon; leading her to conclude that the model is more an object than an instrument.[9] Implicit in Mears' assessment is that the model is not an active contributor, but is

rather an actual object. It is right to say that the model can indeed literally be worked upon (for instance, by make-up artists) or instrumentalised by the artist. However, models instrumentalise their own bodies when they render themselves into artistically relevant forms as they pose. It is in recognising models' expertise in doing so that they can be understood as active creative contributors who *perform* their poses by employing their artistic tools.

As a profession that employs the body, it is imperative to investigate expert movement and how modelling incorporates this. Barbara Montero provides an account of expert movement grounded in proprioception. She defines proprioception as a non-visual internal sense of bodily movement and positioning by means of receptors in joints, tendons, muscles, skin and ligaments. The locus is on the inside of the body, which provides sensory information to the performer, rather than for example relying on visual perception for sensory feedback about one's body, or an imagined third person's view.[10]

Models are in a position where they train their proprioceptive sense to enhance their ability to pose. Modelling comes with an inner sensory awareness, involving a sense of self (it is the model who experiences the movement) which can be consciously experienced and utilised as sensory feedback by the expert. Furthermore, Montero proposes a 'cognition-in-action principle', thus elucidating that way experts keep their conscious control as they act:

> For experts, when all is going well, optimal or near optimal performance frequently employs some of the following conscious mental processes: self-reflective thinking, planning, predicting, deliberation, attention to or monitoring of their actions, conceptualizing their actions, control, trying, effort, having a sense of the self, and acting for a reason. Moreover, such mental processes do not necessarily or even generally interfere with expert performance and should not generally be avoided by experts.[11]

Montero then may be receptive to a multi-level account of artistic agency, in which expert performing can indeed involve a trained sense of knowing when the actions are 'right', while maintaining a high degree of attention. Ellen Fridland has argued for precisely such an account that leaves room for a high-level of control of automated actions. The intense practise required to achieve expert proficiency is important of course because it refines motor control, but also requires that such control be automatic to a point. Experts need 'the cognitive resources to focus on pressing situational demands such as adjusting their goals and strategies'. 'The more skilled an agent, the more ways in which she can interfere with her motor control.'[12] This kind of strategic, automatic attention and motor control is precisely what expert models employ as they pose, responding to other creative actors, environmental factors, while offering their own creative inputs by means of their posing form. It is in this manner that models respond not only to those present with whom

they are working, but they anticipate the aesthetic engagement of viewers with the final creative product and thus strategise their poses accordingly.

At this point, one might want to draw a comparison to dancers working with choreographers to create a new dance to the expert movement involved in modelling. I depart from this, since I take modelling to function in an instantaneous mode of inventing and expressing as formal artistic means, rather than purely preparatory means. Modelling is therefore akin to improvisational dance, in which dancers experiment and invent in the moment of the performance itself, because models effectively search for and select poses as they materialise throughout the modelling itself.

Accounts of expert movement predominantly discuss movement that exists within rigid parameters. Montero and others typically touch upon choreographed dance (particularly ballet) and at times professional sports.[13] A sport like weightlifting, for instance, maintains a clear, most efficient form for the body to achieve the maximum potential in executing these movements. However, expert movement does not need to remain confined to more rigid movement-standards, given how other sports (especially team-sports) do leave room for improvisation as a testimony of expert skill, like those alleged 'legendary' moments in football where players score seemingly impossible goals. Returning to choreographed dance, while unmistakably allowing for impressive manifestations of technique and artistry, modelling adheres to a very different category of bodily expertise given my understanding of its reliance on improvisation. Modelling is different from choreographed dance or sports since the model's pose is neither the ultimate performance nor the sole artwork.

Overall, there is not one 'golden rule' for modelling, nor a set of poses to master in the same way that a ballerina must perfect sets of movements. This is rooted deeply within modelling, given that there is no official training either, not in the same way that performing arts academies exist and educate. Those schools that do exist typically focus on the fashion industry (and are often questionable), but there is no formal life model education.[14] A model must become proficient via the act of modelling itself, which is less regulated than other performing professions.[15] Models are hired precisely for their ability to hold and conceive of poses within the posing session that they are hired for, whether it be a photoshoot, a life class or a private studio session. Depending on the context in which models pose, they must adapt their poses. Before connecting improvisation to creativity in the next section, it's imperative to reconcile improvisation with expert movement in order to illuminate improvisation's role as a salient quality of skilful modelling.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone posits improvisational dance as a unique instance where no choreography is reproduced. The dance is continuously created in the moment, through a 'nonseparation of thinking and doing' rooted in the dancer's own capacity to think in movement.[16] This kinetic intelligence

is simultaneously responsible for creating the dance, as well as informing the dance itself.[17] Sheets-Johnstone highlights a quality of improvisational dance that I recognise in modelling: the ability to create a coherent whole of movements by feeling and judging through the movements themselves. Models namely pose, and it is via the act of posing that they determine, as body experts, which poses and subsequent bodily forms work within the whole of the posing session (whether a photo shoot or life class, or yet another instance) in which they take part.

Aili Bresnahan offers an excellent discussion of philosophical work on improvisation in the arts, and the various disagreements about this ephemeral mode of art making. She elucidates that improvisation 'highlights creativity, immediacy, innovation, and spontaneity as part of its product and activity, although an artist's ability to create these effects may be highly skilled and trained.'[18] Improvisation also alters the aesthetic value and mode of appreciation of its products and events. Particularly close to modelling are accounts of rehearsal improvisation in theatre and film, though film improvisation results in a recording that is replayed for a delayed audience.[19] Models perform for the immediately present artist and crew, or indeed the audience of a runway. Simultaneously, the models must also consider the potential artwork that they are posing towards, as well as its delayed reception. In this manner, modelling can constitute both an immediate and delayed mode of appreciation in line with practices like dance and film.

> To be 'in the moment' and thinking on-the-fly in the way that improvisation requires entails that an artist summons all the skills, training and resources that he or she can muster. Shortcuts, half-hearted efforts and 'faking it' will cause the improvisation to fail in its intent. The artist will lose the audience and the artwork or performance will not ring true. In addition, a good-making feature of improvisation is that it provides the audience with a sense of an 'anticipatory phase' that is 'loaded with expectancy' for what comes next (see Alperson:1998, Clemente, Sterritt).[20]

A salient quality of modelling is precisely this ability to pose in the moment and respond to artistic cues when one models. Models' creative ability and professionalism feed into these similarly good-making features of modelling, and render them first an art object to be regarded by those immediately present, and second an active agent in the creative process. In the act of modelling, one helps generate the artwork that will result from one's work, and it is in this manner that one takes up the role of active contributor. This is the case for life models, fine art photography models, as well as fashion models. Regardless of whether someone is a supermodel or not, their modelling contributes to the artwork-to-be which renders them active collaborators. Like dancers who report that they can feel when a movement is 'right', so too

models who feel into their poses by assessing themselves through their own proprioceptive sense that feeds back information about their physical configuration.

What do models express when they pose, and when is this 'right'? The minimum is the models' response to the guiding aims of the session in which they pose (for instance, an artist might request more angular poses in a particular lighting). The model's interest is at heart a *formal* interest: they conceive of and maintain bodily configurations – poses. While poses can be expressions of a model's private feelings, they are literally shaped by models' body shapes, physical fitness, temperament and indeed formal inclinations. Their formal interest is focused on the presentation of their bodies within a particular space by means of posing, the possibilities of which are highly idiosyncratic according to what models are willing and able to do. The interest to hire specific models is due to particular models' abilities to operate within often pre-determined parameters, while nonetheless drawing on their expertise to move within the space according to their own physical means and formal expression. What models express, coupled with why we value their expertise, now leads to a brief discussion of style.

Scholarship on style in dance has indicated two modes of expression of spatial imagination: 'style$_1$' is a general choice, whereas 'style$_2$' is a personal choice of manner of execution. The general understanding constitutes characteristic movements as they relate to more general ideals, which are not ends in themselves, but serve audience effect.[21] The more personal approach to style constitutes its own 'characteristic articulation of a more general spatial vocabulary. Style$_2$ thus supervenes on and implements personally on style$_1$.' Style$_2$ relates to the:

> significant correlation between the dancer's temperament or personality and the movement idiom he prefers to adopt, where adoption of an idiom consists of the individual articulation of a general set of restrictions. Spatial vocabularies... are best construed as determinations of spatial imagination. In one sense they free the dancer to move. They also limit the exercise of spatial imagination.[22]

Style formulates the link between 'the dancer and the dance as perceived', in which lies the connection to modelling. There is, very similarly, the model as an entity and the poses that she exercises as articulations of her spatial imagination, intimately interlinked with both her expert ability and performing self. Modelling shares a similar problem too, namely, the problem that 'the process of creation is in part an element of the work as it reaches the beholder'.[23]

Whether it is posing for an anatomy class, or for a lucrative cosmetic campaign, there exists a general context of style within which models operate.

The model's body also becomes a form of capital and aesthetic labour. Like dancers, athletes or boxers, models must do 'body work': they thus invest enormous energy and effort to maintain certain bodily states.[24] Modelling is precarious work. Whether life models, fashion models or supermodels, art models are independent contractors who are ultimately responsible for their bodies and appearance, upon which their poses hinge.

Appreciating modelling for its reliance on expertise depends on our identifying its salient qualities, such as expert movement, improvisation and style. These qualities pave the way for our considering modelling a performative practice alongside other performing arts. To continue to solidify modelling's artistic merit, the next section takes a closer look at how models can be both creative and skilled.

III. CREATIVITY

The artistic value of modelling lies in how expert models employ their poses as creative tools and engage with improvisation and style. Posing then becomes a creative, performative improvisation that heavily relies on the model's artistic insight and expertise. Berys Gaut's work on the connection between creativity and spontaneity should help to highlight how modelling is creative, working towards a notion of how modelling ought to be considered a creative, skilled practice.

Gaut first considers the relation between creativity and ignorance in what he coins the Ignorance Principle: '(IP) If someone is creative in producing some item, she cannot know in advance of being creative precisely both the end at which she is aiming and the means to achieve it'.[25] His definition of 'creativity' requires a newness condition, so the item produced must be new to its creator at the time of her being creative. He contrasts this with 'fabricating', where someone does something uncreative. 'If someone is fabricating some item, she *can* know in advance of fabricating it precisely both the end at which she is aiming and the means to achieve it'.[26]

To further ground modelling as a skilled and creative activity, I recommend using Gaut's four markers of skill. First, skill pertains to a special capacity in some area or activity that is not universally shared or possessed by everyone who engages in this activity. Second, skills are considered an accomplishment. Third, one can practice skills, which leads us to the fourth marker: skills are learned rather than purely natural abilities. Creative abilities fit in these markers of skill, not only because being creative is rooted in a domain that is special and considered an accomplishment, but also because being creative can be practised: 'When one practices an activity in which one is creative, one can thereby practice the skills of creativity.'[27] Not everyone has an innate ability to pose when confronted with a camera or sketchbook. We tend to admire those who can pose successfully, recognising the accomplishments of models or social media influencers in the public eye. The sheer

act of posing will lead to further honing modelling as a profession dealing with artistic and bodily challenges. This also comprises the fourth marker, namely that one can learn to pose and present oneself. It is not a natural ability, though some may indeed be naturally more at ease with posing. One improves by engaging with the creative act and becoming better acquainted with the relevant skills. Modelling, then, is skilled work which the model can practise and improve upon.

Gaut has also discussed the importance of particular attitudes and values to being creative, intertwining creativity with an attitude of courage. A person can have creative ability, but be terrible at exercising this skill: they may not dare to take the risks involved in being creative due to feeling overly shy. We value creative skills for how 'creative persons exhibit a kind of freedom, they are not bound by routines, but they can stand back from them, consider whether they are for the good and act in a way that is goal-directed but not routinized', because undertaking such a non-routinised activity results in taking a risk.[28] Creative acts become inherently risky, precisely because they lack the pre-determined outcome that comes with routinised activity. Therefore, a key virtue of creativity is the person's courage that manifests throughout their creative activity, as they aim to achieve something valuable and are 'knowingly prepared to take risks to achieve it'.[29]

Applied to modelling, one can conclude that modelling is both skilled and creative – relying on precisely the courageous virtue of creativity that Gaut proposes. This is evidenced by the model's poses being typically improvised – to which end models rely on great skill and corporeal insight. They must adapt continuously to the medium, and any sudden (artistic) variables. Richard Shusterman identifies this difficulty in his experience of posing for photographer Yann Toma. He observes that 'it is difficult to define... because its physical actions of positioning and posing are typically performed without a formal script or scenario that defines the mise-en-scene (...) and instead allow the posings and probing sorties to be guided freely by the quality and direction of the experience that we shared and improvised together'.[30]

The objective of the model is probing for the 'right' poses. One might object and say that this is no different than dancers in rehearsal, in which they engage in a process of experimenting and learning a particular choreography. Posing, however, relies on an instantaneous invention which functions as a crux for the artwork-to-be. While life sessions or photoshoots invite experimentation, any photograph taken or glimpse caught could constitute the selected final piece. Models simultaneously contribute to art making. They not only constitute the artwork's subject, but they bear an influence on what is represented without being the medium of the artwork, as is the case with dance. One could object and say that the artist is the person with final executive power over the artwork, though my position is that the expert model in a true collaborative position shares responsibility over this execution.[31]

In introducing the salient qualities of modelling as a skilled profession, I have shown how it relies on expert movement, improvisation and style. In so doing, I have already touched on other performing arts, predominantly dance, and how modelling relates. Having traced how modelling is not merely skilled action, but also a creative act, for which the model uses posing as a tool; the discussion moves to how modelling can be considered a hybrid art, following Jerrold Levinson's concept of this. To get there, I will first touch upon David Davies' account of art-making as performance, before identifying how modelling has transformed into a hybrid art given models' absorption of performance-related qualities.

IV. MODELLING AS A HYBRID ART FORM

David Davies theorises about artworks as performances in and of themselves, not merely reserving the term 'performance' for literal performance pieces. For theatre and dance, he characterises the shared understandings that constitute performance and its vehicular medium as including

> 'bodily movements, while the artistic medium will include a distinctive vocabulary for characterizing those movements and various conventions for representing or expressing particular mental states of the performer through bodily movements so characterized.'[32]

The focus when one appreciates an artwork is located in three senses. First, one focuses on the aim of the performance; that which motivates the performance to be made. Second is the thing whose accomplished specification marks a temporal boundary of the performance of that work. Third, and most significant, is that the performance is 'construed as a doing which achieves something determinate'.[33] Audience members not only care about aspects of an art historical context that stimulate the artist's manipulations of a vehicular medium, but they are also interested in the creative product. In this manner, Davies allows for different interpretations of the same piece as being a disagreement about what the artist achieved after going through a specific series of 'motivated manipulations'.[34] To make this consonant with the cases explored in this paper, a crucial part of what Davies considers to be the artist's labours would constitute the model's role in helping to achieve a particular focus.

The vehicular medium in those artistic situations that require a model exists via the combination of the model's body and form in collaboration with the artist. The artistic medium then consists of those conventions that determine poses and the model's (self-)presentation. These conventions engender expectations with regards to the types of poses one expects in a given context. For instance, different poses might be expected from a life model who sits for a sculpting class as compared to a model on a fashion shoot.

While Davies considers artworks performances, I imagine him ignoring the performative aspects of modelled images, since his notion of work neglects the artist's labour.[35] Having discussed the expertise that informs modelling, such as a keenly developed bodily awareness, proprioception, sense of style, and improvisation, it stands to reason that modelling itself is at the very least performative.

Jerrold Levinson conceptualised hybrid art forms, and specifies that hybridisation is not a matter of merely recombining pre-existing materials, but in fact merging artistic categories and their antecedents.[36] Hybrid status is then a historical thing, in virtue of an art form's development out of art forms that came before.[37] Levinson distinguishes different types of hybrids, of which his transformational type is most applicable to modelling. Such a hybrid 'is not halfway between A and B; it is basically A transformed in a B-ish direction'.[38] Some defining feature of one or both of the arts is somehow challenged, such that a resultant kinetic sculpture is no longer stationary as sculpture usually is.[39] Despite the long historical progression of modelling, it is really in the last two centuries that people have recognised it as a profession, enabling the identification of two types: private and public art models working in artists' ateliers and fine art academies, respectively. A third type of model was born with the rise of photography, mass production and mass media in the 20th century. Going back as far as the 19th century, Parisian life model Cadamour was famed within Parisian artists' networks for his innovative poses, to such a degree that he had the capacity to turn down artists if the job did not suit him.[40] To continue building the case for modelling as a hybrid art, I now touch upon recent scholarship on performance personas in relation to acting and theatre, as well as audience appreciation, to demonstrate how modelling has adopted these qualities.

The use of personas in performing arts like acting is a practice that is no longer alien to modelling. Wesley Cray theorised about performance personas, which modelling has taken on as an instance where a person and her performance can be difficult to disentangle from one another. A persona is *transparent* when the audience can perceive the private individual, explicitly or implicitly making inferences about the performer 'from facts and observations about the persona, and vice versa'.[41] One cannot make inferences about the performer qua private individual, for instance, if they portray a fictional character 'through an act of "aesthetically-controlled embodied imaginative transformation" '.[42] Opaque personas are often adopted outside the performance during stage banter or interviews, for instance. Cray considers this opaque persona a *performance* persona, more closely related to acting. Crucially, 'knowledge of whether a performance persona is transparent or opaque informs us about which facts we are to *screen off* or *allow in* – perhaps even *project* – when engaging aesthetically' with the performance.[43] This will only be *indirectly* relevant to aesthetic evaluation in the case of transparent performance personas, to the extent that facts about the persona matter for the

attempted communication. People tend to signal that they have adopted an opaque persona, inviting the audience to consider why they chose to do so, with those features, in this context.[44] With the rise of fashion models in the 20th century, individual models started creating a brand for themselves, which is celebrated and represented. They increasingly transgress the boundaries between acting and other forms of performance – consider the many models who have taken on acting careers, for instance Tilda Swinton and Cara Delevingne.

Models, especially those in the public eye, present public personas and will model according to the persona and qualities for which they are widely known. Furthermore, they take on attributes, such as clothing, make-up, and other styling, to create an atmosphere and impression. It is worth drawing attention to the point that 'regular' models also rely on reputation, persona, being known for particular types of modelling and corporate brand associations. Highly skilled models exist across all types of modelling, though some are more renowned than others.

Actors like Cary Grant seemingly only ever act 'as themselves', wherever they appear, employing a persona. Modelling straddles the boundaries of what constitutes posing, acting and performing more broadly. Models exist as private individuals who do creative work that has the potential to become highly public. A brief overview of the manners in which various expert models can take on personas, then, should solidify how performance-related qualities like performance personas are present within the profession of modelling. While this is necessarily limited, it is still worthwhile listing how professional models, whether life model or supermodel, can employ performance personas. This includes opaque personas, for instance, that of the supermodel who lives a fast-paced life of luxury in the public eye, which she keeps up outside of her shoots. The supermodel operates her brand within the rationale of opaque personas, even if she temporarily poses differently for individual projects, she eventually falls back on the opaque persona rather than her private self. 'Regular' models, who do not live this life of fame, similarly take on performance personas. Models often become known for a speciality – take, for instance, the type of poses they come up with, which determine the kind of work created in response to their forms. Dominic Blake, for instance, is known within London art circles for his angular and slow-moving geometric poses that are often quite contorted. Such poses can create highly intimate encounters, such as the life model's nude modelling, whereby the model fundamentally performs a series of poses and forms to establish distinct physical and artistic qualities. It is in this manner that modelling becomes a hybrid practice that takes on performance-like qualities, such as this anchoring of the model within a persona.

Modelling as a profession maintains an odd relationship with spectatorship. James Hamilton argues that art forms beyond theatre, like music or dance, have no implication that an audience would be present. While no au-

dience is present in rehearsals for narrative performance or improvisation, he remarks that once a routine is established the actors become aware of spectators' positions and adapt their material to render it accessible.[45] One might be tempted to apply this to modelling, given that modelling itself is not the artwork itself, and the artwork itself is in fact beheld by a different audience than those present to witness the modelling. In fact, the direct physical connection between models and the delayed audience of the artworks towards which they pose rather resembles Hamilton's theatre example, since the delayed audience feels present to the working model. Modelling, firstly cannot merely be classified as a rehearsal in the way that actors rehearse for a play, since the model's every pose can feature in the final artwork she contributes to, and, secondly, models are witnessed in person regardless. The model adapts her poses for those immediately present, but also often takes into consideration how she will appear in the resulting artwork. Here a distinction can be identified between the 'artist-spectator' and 'artwork-spectator', both of whom engage with the model and her representation at different stages and in different ways. This brings us more deeply into the territory of audience appreciation and reception.

Sue Spaid introduces the two-step Presentation and Reception Model (PRM), in which she emphasises the importance of audience appreciation (reception) as the point at which 'performance completion' occurs, arguing that any individual artist's or curator's interpretation of a piece need not be final.[46] Artworks tend to outlive the artists who made them, and she points out that curators who engage in executive decisions on the presentation of artworks in, for instance, exhibitions, 'perform the artwork' according to their interpretation for a receptive audience.[47] This (forgotten) importance of reception matters to models, too, whose performances do not merely stop after they have informed the resultant image. These images 'live', as it were, received and interpreted by various audiences, which the models anticipate to a degree as they present themselves initially. Their performance is for those immediately present, which likely results in an image, but it does not end there – it ends when this image is then displayed and received.

This exploration has aimed to illustrate how modelling has taken on a variety of qualities from other art forms to be considered a hybrid art. Having sketched performance personas and audience-related particularities of modelling as a hybrid art form, in conjunction with the earlier treatment of expert movement, improvisation, and style in conjunction with creativity, I end by discussing cases of highly performative models and how our contemporary situation is expediting the transformation of modelling.

V. MODELS AS PERFORMERS

Isabelle Mège presents a curious example of how models can maintain strong artistic convictions and performative abilities, steering the creation of artworks. Mège is in fact a medical secretary in Paris, who since 1986 has been methodically contacting photographers whose work she admires, requesting to collaborate within their art. All photographs depict her body to some degree. Joel-Peter Witkin photographed his iconic *Nègre's Fetishist* in 1990 with Mège, and describes how there is a desire within her body to create the image. 'The photograph needs the sitter. And that is one of the best images I have ever made. I could not have made it with another person.'[48] Mège demands great control over the process, unconventionally entering not merely into collaborations with artists of her choosing, but requiring that they photograph her in the manner she wishes. Rather than functioning as a purely technical aid to the artist's ends, Mège is a model who invents and expresses.

The absorption of performative qualities has occurred in life modelling too, particularly in the last century. Models do not simply mindlessly sit and wait to be directed like a puppet-master plays a puppet. Quentin Crisp is a well-known queer British model who gained fame for his highly performative invented poses which he brought to ateliers. He has been described as the author of his space, and critics describe his spatial possession of a room as a kind of 'anatomical perspective' that he conceives of and performs.[49] In 2019, Dominic Blake was interviewed by *The Guardian* and subsequently spoke at The National Gallery about his work as a full-time life model. Importantly, he addressed the question of whether some life models ought to be considered artists.[50] Currently, Blake not only considers himself an artist, but he describes modelling as drawing in space.[51] He is specifically requested by drawing groups and professional artists because he brings highly performed, geometric and contorted poses. In his talk, he touched upon how he's initiated conversations with independent artists to acknowledge the significance of his collaborating on the conception of their artworks. This has enabled him to negotiate a percentage of the sale from those collaborative artworks that sell, rather than receiving the one-time payment life models typically receive.[52] He is eloquent about how he creates and prepares his poses, describing them as sketches drawn with his body, at times in response to extant art works such as Kandinsky's *Composition VIII*, 1923.[53] Such practices have helped to transform modelling into a 'performance-ish' direction, echoing Levinson's characterisation. Rooted in a rich history, these contexts have changed how we understand modelling within the arts and encourage us to recognise how models have absorbed qualities from other performing arts such as acting, film and performance art, thus transforming their practice over time.

The current pandemic context that we have been living through has resulted in a curious development for life models, even as it arose out of necessity. Throughout the lockdown of society, which halted most people's social and working lives, a multitude of models who were rendered unable to work

or receive furloughs due to their lacking contractual obligations, began to livestream posing sessions. Some created themes focused on a selection of artworks or genres, while others engaged with the notion of modelling for two-dimensional screens by cropping poses and creating perspectives meant to inspire attendees.[54] Models offer not only their unique bodies and a niche of poses, but in fact determine themes, props and backgrounds. The boundaries between modelling and other performing arts blur here. This is one rare positive consequence of the pandemic, which hopefully may give rise to a deeper awareness of the existing performative quality of poses and expertise that models bring to the stage. On private social media accounts, models have reported earning enormously more than they ordinarily do working for academies or drawing groups. Since livestreaming allows global participants to attend, some models reportedly earn sums like £100 per hour, versus the typical £12 per hour paid by London art schools in 2021.[55] It remains to be seen to what extent life models will continue to accept the precarious lack of contractual protections and liveable wages once the Covid-19 pandemic measures fully relax.

One thing remains consistent since the early 20th century. Whether life models or fashion models, the modelling profession continues to transform in a performance direction. The Paris protests, intimate fashion model interviews and various groups' campaigns predate the pandemic, all of which may indicate that we could be nearing a point in time where the artworld and art education institutions must reconsider how they treat and incorporate models. The pre-pandemic pressure and the taste of much improved pay and conditions, recently experienced by some models, could mean that the broad art sector will be required to rethink its precarious use of models and to update their work terms to reflect acceptable contemporary conditions. These issues echo the increasing attention to fashion world's narrow body standards and the related plethora of health conditions and eating disorders suffered by its models, as well as this industry's sluggish engagement of a broader range of not only body sizes, but also ethnicities and differently-abled bodies.[56]

I have traced the ways in which posing differs from other performative arts. Models perform in front of a widely varied degree of live audience, and there is usually a resulting creative product to which end they model. The salient performative qualities are those of style and improvisation, and performativity in which modelling shares features with other performing arts. In this manner, it becomes a hybrid art form that can be aesthetically appreciated by those immediately present, and those who will spectate the resulting image. While modelling exists as a supporting practice to other artistic media like photography or the traditional visual arts, it should be considered for its own professional and aesthetic qualities which it lends to these media. Hardly limited to their expertise in physical performance, skilled models will cultivate a profound understanding of the media with which they collaborate. Modelling is not merely supplementary to other art forms; it demands schol-

arly attention and aesthetic appreciation. Examining models as performers will deepen our understanding of the nature of posing, as well as contributing to existing discussions within aesthetics about various art forms such as drawing, painting, sculpting and photography. It will also strengthen the argument for improved working conditions and insists on the recognition of modelling as a skilled profession which has creative merit. Modelling deserves to be recognised as a performative practice, informing our grasp of its position both within art making and ultimately how spectators engage with models in the various forms they encounter them.[57]

aurelie.debaene@gmail.com

NOTES

[1]Examples of auto-ethnographic academic publications: Soley-Beltran 2006; Bruni Lopez y Rojo 2015. Some autobiographies by models are: Crawford and Katherine 2015; Crisp 1968; Moss and Baron 2012; Swain 2016; Wek 2008.

[2]See Debaene 2021 for a phenomenology of posing and a broader discussion of the use of poses as an artistic tool. Treated here is how poses might enhance or diminish authenticity in portraiture.

[3]The BBC film *Titian – Behind Closed Doors*, directed by Matthew Hill, accompanied London's National Gallery exhibition 'Titian – Love, Desire, Death' March 16 – June 14 2020, 57 min, April 4 2020. Transcription mine, quote taken 36:14 minutes into the documentary.

[4]Bullen 1998; Gedo 2010; Oliver 2001; Waller 2006; Nead 1992; Borzello 1982; Hobhouse 1988; Bignamini and Postle 1991; Lathers 2001; Desmarais, Postle, and Vaughan 2006.

[5]Entwistle 2000, 2009; Entwistle and Wilson 2001; Mears 2011; Wissinger 2010, 2012, 2015.

[6]See *Posing Modernity*, which accompanied 'Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today', Wallach Art Gallery, New York, US, 24 October 2018 – 10 February 2019 and *Le modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse*, which accompanied 'Le modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse', Musée d'Orsay, Paris, FR, 26 March – July 14, 2019.

[7]Rijksmuseum, '*Isabella*, Simon Maris, ca. 1906'. Accessed November 20 2021, http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.9468.

[8]Baxandall 1987, 72-73.

[9]Mears 2011, 90.

[10]Montero 2016, 182.

[11]Montero 2016, 38.

[12]Fridland 2014, 2748, 2749.

[13]Fraleigh 1987, Shusterman 2008.

[14]Commission 2021. Since there is a lack of regulation, fraudulent modelling schools can operate by preying on vulnerable or gullible people. There may be hidden fees involved, getting locked into working with particular photographers, and so on. Most harmful is the promise of a guaranteed career, and many models find themselves left alone, indebted and without the promised network after their course ends.

[15]See Tarbox 2016. Parisian art models protested between 2008 and 2016 against the lack of economic regulation and lack of recognition for their profession as skilled work. They demanded improved job security, better wages and a move away from the temporary worker agreements they ordinarily receive.

[16]Sheets-Johnstone 1981, 399-400.

[17]Sheets-Johnstone 1981, 405.

[18]Bresnahan 2015, 580.

[19]Bresnahan 2015, 576.

[20]Bresnahan 2015, 579.

[21]Sirridge and Armelagos 1977, 19.

[22]Sirridge and Armelagos 1977, 20.

[23]Sirridge and Armelagos 1977, 23.

[24]Mears 2011, 88. Mears remarks that in many situations, fashion models' bodies are continuously touched, exposed, and talked about in the third person.

[25]Gaut 2018, 134.

[26]Gaut 2018, 135. Gaut connects spontaneity to creativity, which I will leave aside on this occasion in favour of Bresnahan's notion of improvisation that fits more tightly with performing arts.

[27]Gaut 2009, 95.

[28]Gaut 2009, 101.

[29]Gaut 2009, 102.

[30]Shusterman 2012, 250, 258.

[31]I distinguish between three types of poses that exist in art making contexts. These are the guided, self-improvised and collaborative pose; they depend on the agency involved in the making of the pose. See Debaene 2019, 218.

[32]Davies 2004, 61.

[33]Davies 2004, 151.

[34]Davies 2004, 155.

[35]Davies 2004, 151. Davies further clarifies that 'This work, as performance, is the particular performance through which this focus of appreciation is specified. This is why the product of the artist's labours, while not itself the work, is still the focus of our appreciative interest in the work. It is the manipulation of the vehicular medium in the interest of specifying this focus that we appreciate.'

[36]Levinson 1984, 11.

[37]Levinson 1984, 6.

[38]Levinson 1984, 10.

[39]Levinson 1984, 10.

[40]Berk Jimenez and Banham 2013, 97-98.

[41]Cray 2019, 184.

[42]Zamir 2014, 12, quoted in Cray 2019, 184.

[43]Cray 2019, 186.

[44]Cray 2019, 187-188.

[45]Hamilton 2010, 7.

[46]Spaid 2019, 715.

[47]Spaid 2019, 720.

[48]Heyward 2016.

[49]Armstrong 2012, 112-113.

[50]Jonze 2019.

[51]See Blake's professional site: `https://www.dominicblake.co.uk/`.

[52]Blake presented the lecture, 'Are Life Models Artists?' at Mall Galleries, London, United Kingdom, August 15 2019.

[53]Takahashi 2018.

[54]Beecher 2020.

[55]The National Living Wage in the UK as of April 2021 is £8.91 per hour for workers of 23 years of age and over. See: https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates. Life models typically do not receive contracts and at best might expect to be hired for a series of classes which might last 2 to 4 hours per class. The reality is that life models take on many odd jobs simultaneously. Considering travel time and cost, which may not be reimbursed, models tend to work below the living wage and with constant job insecurity.

[56]France has been at the forefront of this, by passing a law in 2015 as an amendment to the Health minister's Health Bill (into effect in 2017), banning extremely thin models from fashion shows and rendering it illegal to promote images that 'glorify anorexia on the internet'. Furthermore, a Charter on Models' Wellbeing was informally agreed by various key fashion houses. See: 'Kering and LVMH Draft Charter on Models' Wellbeing' 2017.

[57]Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Design Culture and Somaesthetics Conference in May 2019 at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest (Hungary), at the European Society for Aesthetics' Annual Conference in June 2020 at the University of Warsaw (Poland), and at the virtual American Society For Aesthetics' Pacific Meeting in March 2021. I would like to express my gratitude to the audience members of these various conferences for their suggestions. In particular, I'd like to thank Aili Bresnahan, whose excellent comments significantly helped develop this piece. I am also thankful to two anonymous reviewers and the editor-in-chief of *Aesthetic Investigations* for their constructive feedback. Lastly, I am grateful to Jonathan Friday and Hans Maes for their guidance and supervision.

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