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Gy(Nae)co(Logic)

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Fine Art

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Abstract

This exhibition proposal aims to increase the visibility on gynaecologic conditions through a feminist lens, featuring contemporary artists centring on women's lived experiences with chronic health conditions and accessing healthcare in a patriarchal system.

The title *Gy(nae)co(logic)* is a reference to the lack of logic within the structure and application of healthcare when treating women, as medical misogyny historically clouds rational conclusions, using Scots within the title naturally as I am Scottish and the exhibition is set in Scotland.

This text explores the relevance of artworks on display at the V&A gallery in Dundee, Scotland in aiding with breaking down of stigma in women's health. Featuring an eclectic medium of works by nine contemporary artists: Eugenie Lee (b. 1974), Helen Chadwick (b.1953-96), Katherine Fay Allan (b. 1996), Lindsey Mendick (b.1987), Poppy Gilfillan (b.2003), Saoirse Amira Anis (b. 1997), Tonia Nneji (b. 1992), Tracey Emin (b. 1963) and Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972).

Content Warning: Abortion, disability, discrimination, racism, references to death, surgery and an image of a brain.

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Positionality statement

Terminology

It is important to note that throughout this exhibition proposal I will largely use the term 'women/woman' to reference those suffering with gynaecological conditions, but I want to acknowledge that transgender men and women, non-binary and intersex people may also experience gynaecologic conditions (S. Jeffrey et al, 2024), pregnancy and menstruation and this exhibit is for them just as much as cis-gendered women. I do not wish to exclude anyone from feeling represented within this text or exhibition because of the language used.

The context of identity

As a queer person, I understand that having a queer gender identity and a biological-sex-related condition comes with additional complications of discrimination in care and gender dysphoria and more that I do not touch on within this text.

I am also a white Scottish artist, and while I strive to have a diverse and fair approach to selecting the artists I'm including and the research I utilise on these topics- I must acknowledge this is the perspective from which I write and am inherently biased by. Similarly to the queer identity, I also feel as though the experience of being a person of the global majority and/or indigenous identity and having a gender-related health condition is something which cannot be easily summarised in such a broad text, nor do I believe I would be the correct person to do this with the understanding it deserves.

My experience

I started experiencing concerning symptoms almost a decade ago of (but not limited to) monthly fainting, vomiting, loss of bowel control, severe fatigue, extreme and sudden

body temperature change and debilitating pain. What I now know as 'endo flare-ups', used to be this terrifying sudden and largely unpredictable full-body experience of anguish and embarrassment. It has happened in countless public places, among strangers where I didn't have the physical ability nor the vocabulary to explain what was happening to me and because awareness is so low most people were clueless of what was happening and how to help. I've collapsed in the lunch hour rush of high school children, curled up in a gutter on the pavement and had people practically step over me. I have had roughly over one hundred experiences like this.

Because this is something that is so present in my life, naturally it has informed my practice. I started making art about my condition when I felt isolated and powerless due to my health concerns being unheard, people start looking at you accusatorially when you explain the severity of your symptoms, *but* that the trusting all-knowing doctors say that there's nothing wrong. Processing my feelings on my health through artmaking has opened an avenue of expression. My intangible problems under the surface of my skin could be seen, touched and understood slightly more by the people around me. It made my condition feel real to others, and to myself as after being gaslit for so long, it's logical to start doubting your reality.

Introduction

As the title suggests, this exhibition surrounds living with gynaecologic conditions and my distaste towards how the study and treatment of women's health is enacted. By spotlighting contemporary artists' work on the subject, I hope for 'Gy(nae)co(logic)' to empower those who have these conditions and encourage empathy in the treatment of these conditions by medical professionals and wider society. Depicting these experiences and realities is important in breaking down women's health stigmas and provides representation for silently suffering communities.

Despite many trips to the doctor's office with extensive personal research, I was only diagnosed and treated for the first time during the writing of this dissertation. My timeline isn't unique though, with the organisation Endometriosis UK conducting a survey on endometriosis diagnosis times; 'The new study shows that diagnosis times in the UK have significantly worsened over the last 3 years, increasing to an average of 8 years and 10 months, an increase of 10 months since 2020' (Endometriosis UK, 2024). Aside from regular NHS wait times from being under-staffed and under-funded, this delay in diagnosis is also due to the stigmas surrounding women's healthcare.

Though this exhibition takes a specific focus on tackling the taboo of gynaecologic conditions through art, it's important to include the context of how women's pain in general in art history has been handled as a foundation to this topic and the misogyny ingrained in it.

Misogynoir in relation to healthcare is a topic with its evidence sadly saturated throughout modern politics and history, and while I do not go into this specific theme in depth, black women's experiences are crucial perspectives in the history of gynaecology and understanding intersectionality within healthcare. It is known that the 'father of gynaecology' acquired this title through discoveries made by medically experimenting onto multiple enslaved young black women without anaesthesia. (H. Downes, 2020)

In a medical setting it's profoundly difficult to be believed or adequately cared for as a woman in pain. In the art world throughout history, this discrimination carries over with men's pain in artworks being treated with dignity and commended for their bravery. Whereas for women and gender non-conforming artists, works about their pain is largely viewed as a natural part of life, a famous Pablo Picasso quote is an example of this: 'women are machines for suffering' (C. Delistraty, 2017), this statement implies pain is intrinsic to existing as a woman, and often romanticised.

I would also like to note that a traditional exhibition dissertation has four chapters, but in this proposal, due to the nature of the subject matter, chapter's three and four on curatorial influences naturally merged. It made more sense to me to structure it the way I do to avoid repeating myself.

Chapter 1: Curatorial thesis

Through a feminist lens, centring on women's lived experiences with chronic health conditions and accessing healthcare in a patriarchal system, I want to exhibit works which conjure feelings of being represented authentically in your most vulnerable state and empower political and societal change in that acknowledgement.

Among artworks with specific representation of disorders like polycystic ovary syndrome and endometriosis, I also chose to represent works which fit into the wider category of women's health and politics to express the notion that these categories are inseparable from one another. Community and intersectionality are vital in raising awareness of people from minority groups' suffering.

1.1 Why Contemporary Artists?

To depict the treatment of women's health conditions in this specific exhibition, featuring only modern artists is beneficial in several ways- but perhaps simply as they are the freshest works on an underrepresented topic. Women's health, while still being taboo, is now an easier subject matter to depict due to less social stigma, an increase in medical knowledge and political action since the 1970s.

The women's health movement emerged in the 60s/70s and advocated for more scientific research and social change (F.H. Nichols, 2000), with that came new medical discoveries. Medical advancements in the form of surgical treatments for the symptoms of gynaecologic conditions (T. Seckin, 2021) and treatment for fertility with the first in vitro fertilization (IVF) baby being born. (A.M. Eskew and E.S. Jungheim, 2017)

Medical advancements being made in women's reproductive and gynaecologic health at this time meant that the public and women themselves had access to more knowledge about how their bodies functioned. This understanding was hugely beneficial for people in questioning the stigma surrounding women's health and to start taking political action against discrimination in accessing sufficient healthcare.

Spain passing the law for menstrual leave from work for severe period pain in 2023 being the first ever European country to do so (C. Bello, 2022), alongside securing abortion laws across the country- is an important moment in history for the acknowledgement of women's health conditions.

There is, of course, artworks pre-1970s which are crucial feminist depictions in history of women's health, like the revolutionary Mexican painter Frida Kahlo's (b. 1907) self-portraits of her disability, or Baroque Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi's (b. 1593) work inspired by suffering sexual violence. Artists like these have paved the way for women today to depict their own suffering with less stigma, though they themselves have only really been praised as they should be now, within modern history. And while many people still look to their work for representation around these themes, I believe women artists should be celebrated and have their place in history acknowledged whilst they are living. Investigating post-1970s artworks on this topic allows women to see themselves represented accurately within the modern society they live in, making the work more relatable and therefore *in my opinion* more impactful.

Society isolates those with health issues by demanding they participate in ways only possible in a specific body, even if that is not accessible to them. The world needs to become more inclusive, and when spaces create microcosms of this, such as the aim for this exhibition, meaningful connecting moments can be had. 'Sometimes we are blessed with being able to choose the time, and the arena, and the manner of our revolution, but more usually we must do battle where we are standing' (A. Lorde, 1984).

Or in the case of someone with a gynaecologic condition, we must do battle where we are laying, with stomach cramps and shedding hair.

The art world is reflecting this slow progress with more artists publicly making work about their conditions and women's health, making it easier to speak on these issues and see change being made about the way they are discussed. In London, the world's first 'Vagina Museum' was opened in 2017 to combat this stigma, their objective being:

‘The advancement of education and the promotion of equality and diversity for the public benefit by establishing and maintaining a museum and collections focused on gynaecological anatomy and its place in science, culture, society and history’ (Vagina Museum, 2024) .

1.2 Intended Audience and Exhibition Venue

My intended audience for this exhibition is those suffering with gynaecological conditions who have likely never seen a public display on this topic, who have been taught to be ashamed, mask their symptoms and play down what they are going through.

I want Gy(nae)co(logic) to feel comfortable but significant and the V&A in Dundee has this perfect balance, by being well respected yet accessible to many types of people. Architect Kengo Kuma who designed the building intended for it to be a ‘living room for the city.’ (V&A, 2018)

The reputation of the London V&A and the global themes of its exhibitions gather tourists and students from around the world, while also being popular among local people for a day out, with over two million gallery goers visiting since it opened in 2018. (A. Hardaker, 2024) The V&A bringing together a broad spectrum of people to this exhibition will reveal different attitudes towards the themes of women’s health and to normalise discussion on gynaecological conditions within wider society. Acknowledgement of these often-invisible issues, in such a monumental building, would be incredibly validating to those silenced.

According to a government evaluation report, ‘Dundee City has one of the highest levels of deprivation in Scotland’(Director-General Health and Social Care, 2025), this is also a crucial factor to Gy(nae)co(logic)’s location as working-class women seeing art pieces addressing issues like health education and treatment wait times disproportionately affect them, inside a major establishment like the V&A would be so validating and empowering.

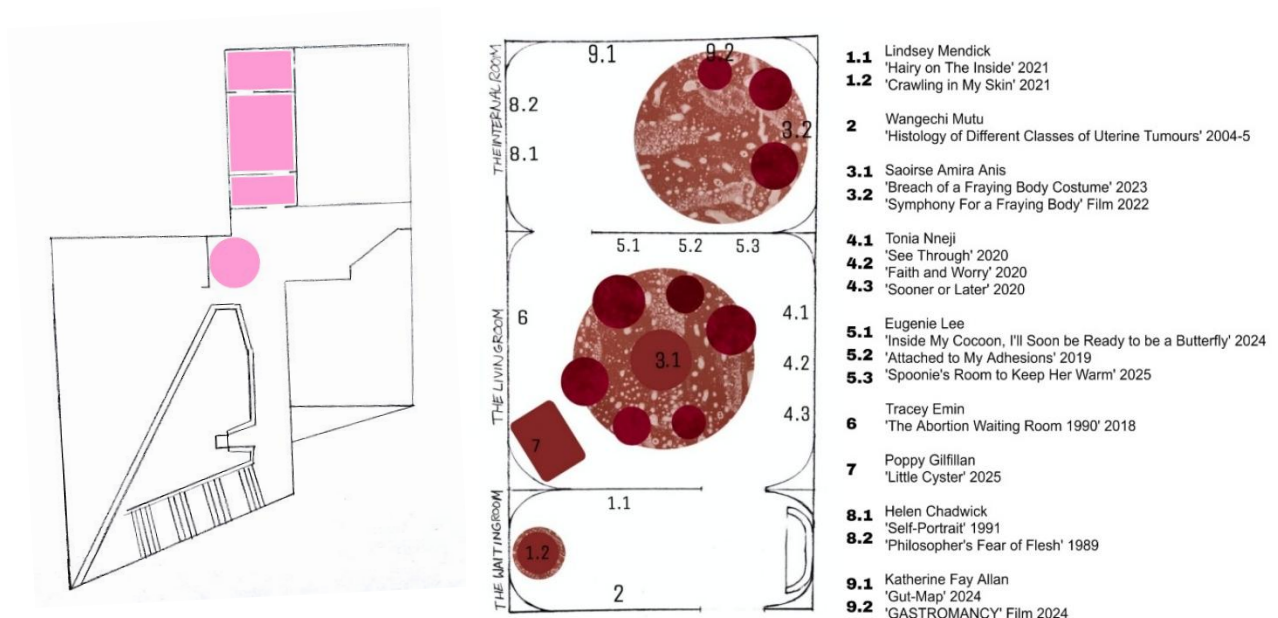
UK artist Emma Hart expresses in relation to the 2023 Edinburgh exhibition 'Poor Things':
'..class isn't discussed much within art, and I've always felt a bit out of place. I'm very
conscious of the fact that I'm a working-class person operating in a middle-class arena.'
(E.Hart, 2023)

These revolutionary ideas for women's health held inside this venue right on the
countries' edge, overlooking the River Tay, feels like they will be seen and go forth, as if in
a ship, and spread across the globe.

Chapter Two: Curatorial Choices

The exhibition 'Gy(nae)co(logic)' will be held within the V&A in their free gallery space, 'The Edmundson Gallery', as accessibility for all is important to this exhibition, regardless of income. The contemporary works of nine artists were carefully selected to represent the spectrum of experience within women's health conditions from artists with lived experience. These works will be spread across three loosely divided rooms; 'The Waiting Room', 'The Living Room' and 'The Internal Room', to fit the various atmospheres in which the works are best displayed in. Outside The Edmundson Gallery, in The Michelin Gallery area, will be 'The Learning Womb'. This will be an area for visitors of the exhibition to access resources and information about the conditions referenced in the exhibition.

In line with the exhibition's goal of breaking-down existing perceptions; the gallery space itself acts as an immersive installation, and a floor trail flows throughout the building and out the external door.



2.1 The Waiting Room

The first section of the gallery space, and the brightest room for the works to be viewed in efficient lighting, invites the viewer into the exhibition's world through the familiarity of a medical waiting room. A Doctor's office is the commonly perceived setting of health problems, the place you go to 'get fixed' and to have questions answered about your body, though this isn't the reality for the majority of women with chronic gynaecologic conditions.

This space will have typical white gallery walls and wood flooring which matches the rest of the building, easing the viewer into the experience through the well-known but clinical atmosphere of the 'white cube' gallery.





Fig 1.1 'Hairy on the Inside', Lindsey Mendick, Ceramic Mixed Media Werewolf Installation, 2021, Life-sized



Fig 1.2 'Crawling in My Skin', Lindsey Mendick, Glazed Ceramic Pots with Botanicals, 2021

The first pieces within the exhibit are from English artist Lindsey Mendick's (b. 1987) series *Hairy on the Inside* (L. Mendick, 2021), which imaginatively tackle Mendick's experience of having Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS). Originally shown in Cook Latham Gallery as part of a Fertility doctor's waiting room installation and I attempt to recreate this within *Gy(ne)co(logic)*.

The artist represents the PCOS side effect of excess body and facial hair in the form of a werewolf. Insatiable rage which transforms the person into this horrifying creature, the werewolf motif explores how women might feel othered in society or even something to fear. Mendick describes her experiences:

'I have an animalistic feeling of something lurking deep inside me, the bubbling mood swings dictated by the moon cycle that make me vicious and snarl ... the side effects of my cyst ridden ovaries permeating through this thin skin. The wolf that sits in my throat.' (L. Mendick, 2021)

Crawling In My Skin assists the installation's impact on the viewer, creating a more immersive and varied depiction of having a chronic disease as a woman. The sculpture references the self-disgust and distrust in your own body that comes with feeling betrayed by your health with chronic conditions.



Fig 2 'Histology of Different Classes of Uterine Tumours', Wangechi Mutu, 2004-5, 59 x 43.5 cm Per page, 12 Mixed Media Collages on Paper

The next artist featured within the first room is mixed media focused Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972), with twelve collages using medical imagery that you might expect to find in a hospital setting.

Though not inspired by her own direct experiences with health problems, the artist uses her unique visual library, being the daughter of a nurse with access to medical textbooks (National Gallery, 2021), in combination with her own experience of racial and gender identity, to comment on topics which affect others within her community.

The artist criticises the healthcare system using the method of collage, she states: “I pull apart their structure, literally and physically and conceptually, and then reinterpret it for my own purposes and my own interests.” (W. Mutu, 2013) This fits perfectly with the exhibition’s goal of changing global perspectives on the standard of care women and uterus havers receive.

Mutu also uses imagery of women's bodies from magazines to compare the treatment of women, particularly women of colour, in a capitalist, medical and a wider social setting, to show how intersectional these ideas are.

I also perceive the magazine imagery to fit the atmosphere of 'The Waiting Room', as this is media for browsing that would normally be found there.

2.2 The Living Room

The second section of the gallery space, The Living Room, aims to emphasise the chronic nature of health conditions, to expose the unseen reality of still existing within comfortable environments like the home.

Those who experience chronic pain or fatigue are often in constant battle with their bodies symptom's keeping them in bed and the desire to engage with society and meet their responsibilities. For some, this may feel like being stuck in a loop and the circular nature of this room mimics this.

The lighting will be slightly softer with light fabric hanging from the roof and light fixtures, with carpeted floors and pink velvet drapery curtaining the walls and arching the entrance- creating a cosy safe atmosphere.





Fig 3.1 'Breach of a Fraying Body Costume',

Saoirse Amira Anis and Collaborators, 2023,
Fabric, Rope and Mixed Media Costume.

Edited Image by P. Gilfillan



Fig 3.2 'Breach of a Fraying Body'

Performance, Saoirse Amira Anis, Photo by Erika
Stevenson, 2023, V&A Dundee

The pasted imagery of tendrils on the floor, throughout the gallery's building, tempts the viewer into the space through curiosity, to see that they originate from the centre piece of the room: Saoirse Amira Anis's (b. 1997) Costume on a raised platform. The costume from the artist's performance *Breach of a Fraying Body* made in collaboration with designer Sabrina Henry and textile artist Dr Sequoia Barnes featured in the 2023 Contemporary art festival Art Night (Art Night, 2023), where the performer travelled through Dundee, including the V&A gallery.

By commissioning the artist, a version of this performance will take place within the V&A as part of the Gy(nae)co(logic) exhibition. This will consist of the artist temporarily borrowing this costume from the exhibit to perform around the entrance of The Edmundson Gallery, and then to lead the audience out of the building to the sea front. Figuratively and literally, encouraging the audience to take the knowledge contained within the exhibition they have absorbed and go forth with new perspectives into the wider world, connected by land, sea and community.

The performance *Breach of a Fraying Body* connects with the artist's solo exhibition at the DCA in 2023, *Symphony for a Fraying Body*, which tackles the bodily experience of rage in a society that 'others' certain categories of human. The artist's film *Symphony for a Fraying Body* will be featured in the third room of the exhibition, The Internal Room, due to lighting conditions and the thematic approach to the curation of the gallery.

The sculpture-like garment will be displayed on an armature mannequin, surrounded by floor pillows in a ring and carpeted flooring, inviting the viewer to sit and process their feelings of the art within the room's sensory experience. This is partly inspired by the original showing of this piece in the DCA, as the artist custom built a comfortable seat, intending that 'visitors would be encouraged to slow down and consider what it feels like to be in body in this moment in time: not alone but as a part of a community linked by shared worry, shared rage, and shared love.' (DCA, 2023)

It is important for the actual costume to be present within the space as the tactile nature of the twists of thread makes the emotions behind the work tangible to the audience. The presence it would hold within the gallery is crucial, blurring the lines between a looming flesh-inspired monster and a soft solitary still figure, reflecting the contrast of societies view of health conditions and the person experiencing them.



Fig 4.1 'See Through',
Tonia Nneji, 2020, 65 x 91.5
cm, Acrylic and Oil Painting
on Canvas

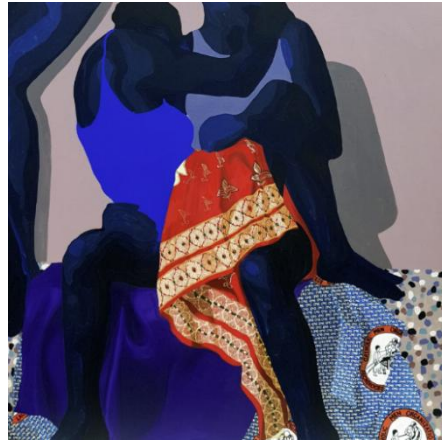


Fig 4.2 'Faith and Worry',
Tonia Nneji, 2020, 122 x 122
cm, Acrylic and Oil Painting
on Canvas



Fig 4.3 'Sooner or Later',
Tonia Nneji, 2020, 122 x 122
cm, Acrylic and Oil Painting
on Canvas

On the first wall perhaps, the viewer will encounter in 'The Living Room', displays the work of Nigerian artist Tonia Nneji (b. 1992), from her *You May Enter* series as a Triptych. This series, stated by the Rele Gallery where it was on show in Lagos, Nigeria; 'is an invitation into a world of trauma and healing, isolation and companionship, creating a space for dialogue and solidarity.' (Rele Gallery, 2020) Each painting points to the different aspects of what it's like to live with the artist's health condition: polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

Faith And Worry presents the push and pull of emotions that chronic illness brings as symptoms fluctuate. With the heads of the figures obscured, the audience relies on body language to sense the atmosphere, though the large amount of blue within the piece gives off the impression of loneliness or low energy. The presence of these deep blues will contrast well within the warm coloured gallery walls, amplifying the work's impact.

Sooner Or Later contains a figure with thick pink fabric knotted around their torso. This flesh-coloured bundle, in combination with the painting title, could be interpreted as the fear of the disease progressing. The knot, like 'a knot in the stomach' of abdominal tightness from anxiety or pain, or even to represent a growth of a cyst internally as flesh

knits together. There is an acknowledgement of the body and disease being out of the artists control, the audience isn't clear on what the artist feels will occur 'sooner or later', but the feeling of helplessness is present.

The title and shadowed face of the subject in *See Through* points to the experience of having your health overlooked as a woman. This portrait being alongside the two larger paintings, serves to ground them. The simple and personable subject matter at head height, connects the viewer's perception of self to the figures depicted in all three pieces.

In a vogue interview about this series, the artist mentions the significance of the traditional Nigerian patterned fabrics within her work in relation to her health condition; 'It made a lasting impact on me when I saw my mother gather her most valuable wrappers....and sell them so she could afford my health bills...' (T. Nneji, 2020) Featuring these sacrificed deeply sentimental fabrics is a way for the artist to commemorate her mother's care and to speak out about the financial burden of having a chronic health condition.



Fig 5.1 'Inside My Cocoon, I'll Soon be Ready to be a Butterfly',

Eugenie Lee, 2024, 48 x 68 cm, Oil on Linen and Board

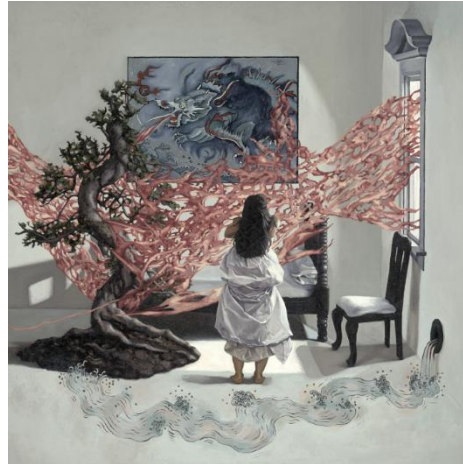


Fig 5.2 'Attached to My Adhesions',

Eugenie Lee, 2019, 70 x 70 cm, Oil on Linen and Birchwood



Fig 5.3 'Spoonie's Room to Keep Her Warm',

Eugenie Lee, 2025, 28 x 45 cm, Oil on Linen and Board

Next 'The Living Room' space displays the oil paintings of Korean- Australian artist Eugenie Lee (b. 1974). These are works I've chosen to display in a triptych as they reflect different dimensions to living with the disease endometriosis, of which the artist is afflicted with.

The largest painting, *Attached To My Adhesions*, is a surrealist indoor scene of which the artist describes being a representation of her inner world and body, and the disease which disturbs it: 'Standing in the room on my own is a metaphor for the private and lonely nature of pain - no one feels the same pain, nor can it be shared' (E.Lee, 2025).

The *Inside My Cocoon, I'll Soon Be Ready to Be a Butterfly*, could be interpreted as the lowest points of being chronically ill; the days where you can't even sit up in a chair, never mind leave the house. Their body curled up tightly upon the only soft surface in the room, wearing a red dress which may be a nod to menstrual blood. This painting speaks to the longing for freedom of mobility like the butterfly. It expresses the yearning and hope for vitality despite of despairing painful circumstances.

The third smaller piece *Spoonie's Room to Keep Her Warm*, shows a figure lying limp, possibly asleep, on a grass rug in a softly lit corner of a room. The figure is much closer in frame within this piece than the previous works in the triptych, creating a sense of

intimacy between the viewer and the subject matter. The white walls replaced with a geometric floral pattern, perhaps nostalgic to the artist's Korean culture, signals a homely setting. All elements of nature within this piece are artificial. This could be the artist commenting that living with chronic pain requires utilising external tools and methods to experience what should be a natural level of comfort- but ultimately like the lamp's short cable; you are still restricted by these resources' limitations.



Fig 6 'The Abortion Waiting Room 1990',

*Tracey Emin, 2018, 184.3 x 216.6 cm, Acrylic
Painting on Canvas*

Another artist I chose to include within this exhibition is the revolutionary Tracey Emin (b. 1963), and her acrylic painting *The Abortion Waiting Room 1990*. This piece was featured within her 2019 solo exhibition *A Fortnight of Tears* at the White Cube Bermondsey in London, displaying honest expression of her experiences, often bodily. In an Article Magazine review, they describe the exhibit as ‘full of the raw humanity Emin is known for: life, love, death, loss — complex and layered, messy and unresolved’ (T. D’Hoker, 2019)

I considered placing this piece in the first room of the gallery, The Waiting Room, as it includes this in the title, but decided the piece is more integral to the theme of living post-waiting room, with the trauma. The title including the year of her abortion ‘1990’, almost thirty years before the painting was made, speaks to the mental impact of gynaecological surgeries, how emotions and memories are stored in the body, and the moral conflicts which happen internally.

Cultural theorist and critic Nathalie Olah connected her experience of endometriosis and the way the artist treated figures within her work, particularly on her abortion, ‘These were

figures distorted by pain, their abdomens mired by thick dark lines and explosions of ink. They were often bent double on the floor or writhing in agony' (N. Olah, 2020).

This piece is important to the exhibition in highlighting broader gynaecologic health issues and reproductive rights women need. Chronic illness and disability are inherently politically intertwined with women's rights and bodily autonomy, and many women might relate to fertility issues caused by conditions like endometriosis, PCOS and cancers.

The artist describes the therapeutic processing of understanding her memories, reworking paintings sometimes multiple times over years:

'I had these two completely different emotions on that one canvas, that weren't about pretty paint, that weren't about trying to make a masterful painting. It was about me, and subconsciously something came out that I wasn't aware was going to come out and when it did come out, I felt so much better.' (T. Emin, 2019)



Fig 7 'Little Cyster',

*Poppy Gilfillan, 2025, 190 x 120cm, Mixed
Media Sculpture on Bed*

Little Cyster is a sculpture roughly 30x30cm created by Scottish artist Poppy Gilfillan (b.2003), installed on a red cushioned fold-out bed in part reference to the artist Tracey Emin's installation *My Bed*, which is why this piece is displayed next to Emin's painting.

This sculpture is the artist's attempt to process their disease (endometriosis) after a diagnostic surgery, in context with the identity of being a 'diseased person' and wider society. The name 'Little Cyster' is a reference to the artist's own sister, and the fear that due to the hereditary nature of the disease, she will also develop the same condition and experience the hardships the artist has. The artist also uses the small body of a 'little sister' to encompass their maternal feelings towards other young women with this disease. They state this as their purpose of the piece: 'I feel a responsibility to help the future of girls and young women who have no voice or answer for their suffering, using my embodied knowledge through art' (P. Gilfillan, 2025).

The artist used traditionally 'masculine' materials like expanding foam, auto spray paint and scaffolding netting, which grounds this invisible 'women's issue' into a tangible form within societies gaze. These materials also have connotations of repair and

deconstruction which relates to the state of bodies with chronic conditions; in constant break down and repair.

This piece is important in delivering to the audience the multiple perspectives within society towards bodies with chronic conditions and disability.

2.3 The Internal Room

The Internal Room, the final room in the exhibition space, is purpose built for works to be viewed in a dark environment. With dark walls and a mirrored floor, which allows for quieter, deep introspection from the viewers as they travel into the furthest point of the gallery. Beyond the initial understanding of disease and what living with it consists of, The Internal Room takes a more serious tone and consideration of mortality, in a sensory liminal space.



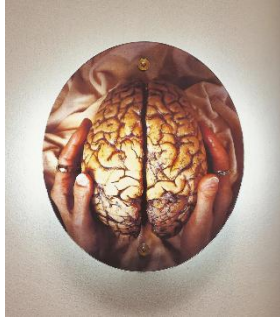


Fig 8.1 **'Self-Portrait'**, Helen Chadwick, 1991, 51 x 44.6 cm, Photographs on Glass Plate and Lights



Fig 8.2 **'Philosopher's Fear of Flesh'**, Helen Chadwick, 1989, 154 x 52 cm, Photographs on Glass Plate and Lights

The first artist featured within 'The Internal Room', is the late Helen Chadwick (b. 1953-1996). Featuring two pieces from her *Meat Lamps* series, which are transparent photographs mounted onto glass plates, lit from behind, which has an alluring glow.

Self-Portrait is a photograph of the artist's hands gently holding a real human brain surrounded by ruffled pink fabric. Due to the lack of context, this could be anyone's brain- which is exactly the artist's intention; to strip away all identity and assumption, to leave the viewer to question what is the self? 'This is, as it were, a portrait of all brains, a kind of collective self-portrait.' (National Galleries of Scotland, 2016)

The value this adds to this exhibition *Gy(nae)co(logic)* is the uniting of every gallery goer regardless of identity; to expose how strange and dangerous misogynistic views within healthcare are- we are all mortal beings that can experience relative suffering and need equal care. Publilius Syrus, a Roman writer stated, 'As men, we are all equal in the presence of death' (P. Syrus, 1st Century BCE). The knowledge that the artist herself is deceased, adds weight to this message for the viewer.

The second piece, *Philosopher's Fear of Flesh*, contains imagery of chicken skin and a human stomach, contrasting embodied animal instinct with the philosophy of the human mind, but at the same time, the infinity symbol shape also unites them. The title of the work seemingly mocks the separation of morals and ideas from the body, inviting the viewer to consider if asking themselves if 'self' is the body or the mind is a pointless argument. The artist uses the materials of the piece to convey this further, stating in a

posthumously published interview: ‘...These things (combining images and light) put them into this ambiguous position of being not exactly a sculpture and not exactly an image, and for me this is the space of a body.’ (H. Chadwick, 1998)

This is important to the viewer’s understanding that chronic conditions, especially gynaecological in nature, are inseparable from the wider life and identity of the individual with the condition - the body affects the mind and vice-versa, and exterior treatment affect both.



Fig 9.1 '**Gut-Map**', Katherine Fay Allan, 2024, Wall-based Research Diagram, Paper, Nails and Red Thread.



Fig 9.2 '**GASTROMANCY**', Katherine Fay Allan, 2024, Still from Digital Film, 24 minutes

The first film piece within this exhibition is 2019 Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design graduate Katherine Fay Allan's (b. 1996) *GASTROMANCY*. The film will be projected from above, onto the dark back wall with seating, similar to that in 'The Living Room', of a circle rug, floor pillows, but also a rotating couch seat.

Self-described by the artist as a film; '...from a Scottish cultural perspective, leaning into our long history of fae mythology as a domain to examine illness and disability.' (K.F. Allan, 2024) The connection to Scottish culture is significant to this exhibition as many of the gallery attendees will be Scottish, being based in Dundee, and may connect with the familiar imagery and metaphors more in trying to understand chronic illness.

The horror-inspired film opens with verses of poetry to sound of gentle wind and an eerie ringing, immediately setting up anticipation that a suspenseful mystery shall be revealed within the film. One line of poetry states, 'Frightful is *its* strangeness, nameless is *its* power, familiar yet faceless, but you must not cower.' (*GASTROMANCY*, 2024) The artist delves into the fear that accompanies living with undiagnosed chronic illness, equating it to an evil invisible figure haunting them, being unable to escape.

Gut-map is the artist's folklore and health research in the creation of the film, but the research itself is turned into art when displayed in a manner reminiscent of a detective's evidence board, which I would feature with a soft surface spotlight. This is likely inspired by the intensive and confusing process of trying to figure out the correct diagnosis when experiencing the symptoms of a chronic condition, with overlapping symptoms to various

diseases, medical gaslighting and women's bodies themselves being under researched, as noted by the gender health gap. (BBC News, 2025)



Fig 10.1



Fig 10.2

'Symphony for a Fraying Body', Saoirse Amira Anis, 2023, Stills from Digital Film, 14 minutes 26 seconds.

The final piece featured in the exhibit and the second film, which will play via projection after Katherine Fay Allan's *GASTROMANCY*, on the adjacent wall, is Saoirse Amira Anis' (b. 1997) *Symphony for a Fraying Body*.

Originally shown in the DCA gallery in Dundee, the artist collaborated with videographer Rachel McBrinn and a small community of creative peers, to make her vision come to life in the form of a film. It follows a mythological creature, metaphorically and literally, going on a journey whilst its body unravels and untangles. It could be interpreted in two ways; one of a body 'fraying' as the title suggests with chronic illness and harming circumstance as time passes, but also the unravelling of learned ideas and knotted emotions. The significance of this message expressed within this exhibition being: this is the journey those with chronic health conditions must go through, to unlearn societies ideals about bodily ability and identities involvement within it, as simultaneously your body is breaking down.

Rage is a focus of this work, which may be seen in the bright red of the costume. The exhibition notes, from its original display in 2023, makes this clear when it states about the film: 'It gives voice to the rebellion and rage of those overlooked by dominant society and assigned as 'other'- their collective agitation by turns quiet, insidious, and powerful.' (DCA, 2023) Women's anger is rarely represented, and when it is it is seldom in a justified light. Anger is an understandable component of the experience of living with a chronic gynaecological condition, towards society, towards medical professionals, government and towards your own body for not functioning the way you want it to.

2.4 The Learning Womb



Led by the installed floor trail from the V&A entrance to the Michelin Gallery space: 'The Learning Womb', is a loosely enclosed installation space with lightweight red and pink fabric, held by gallery wire from the roof in the shape of a cylindrical tent. Beneath this would be a round printed rug, with soft floor seating in a conversational-pit style, to encourage communication between those who enter in a safe comfortable space. The purpose of this space being to expand on the exhibition and understand the work and conditions more with reading material and knowledge, inspired by the format of the DCA's 'Information Space' and 'Create Space', described on their website as, 'a flexible, comfortable and imaginative space where you'll find art materials and activities inspired by the exhibitions in DCA galleries.' (DCA, 2025)

The textile comfortable nature of the space is inspired by artist Allyson Mitchell's (b. 1967) *Hungry Purse* installation first appearing in 2004. This work consists of a sensory textile space to confront the viewer's internalized feelings on the vagina.



Fig 11.1

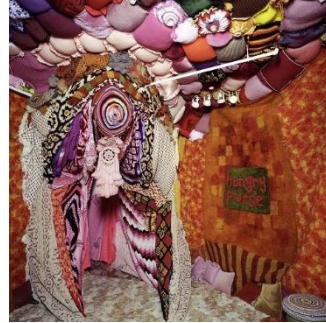


Fig 11.2

'Hungry Purse: The Vagina Dentata in Late Capitalism', Allyson Mitchell, 2004, Room Installation

Though differing to Mitchell's installation, 'The Learning Womb' remains fully accessible and visible to the public, to tackle the taboo that: spaces dedicated to topics on women's bodies and health should be hidden. 'Addressing and dismantling the taboos surrounding SRH (Sexual & Reproductive Health) is crucial for advancing public health and ensuring the well-being of all individuals.' (Mohd. Tohit N, Haque M, 2024)

The space will have educational resources accessible from local charities and health organisation like leaflets, guides, posters and stickers to raise practical awareness on various areas of women's health, as well as free period products and sexual health items like condoms and lubricant to destigmatise these within a prestigious gallery space.

A selection of informative works that I will include, is by Polish British artist Justyna Green (b. 1989), who creates resources on the topic of menstruation and endometriosis. These works make the topics less daunting and more digestible, especially to younger viewers.



Fig 12.1



Fig 12.2

'Modibodi Teen Period Kit', Justyna Green, 2022



Fig 12.3

**'Modibodi Teen Period Kit',
Justyna Green, 2022**

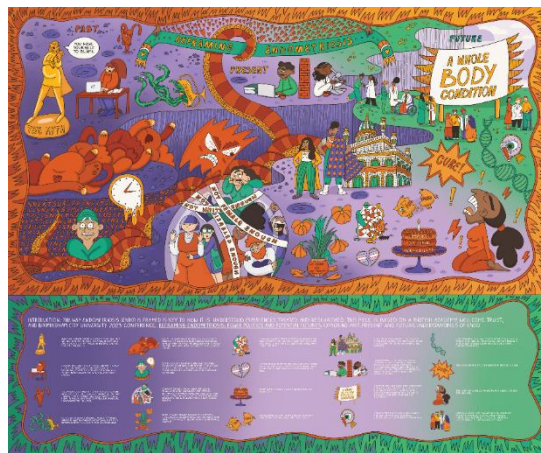


Fig 12.4

**'Reframing Endometriosis: Power, Politics
and Potential Futures', Justyna Green, 2023**

'The Learning Womb', intended for a place to rest and digest the knowledge gained from these works, is also the perfect setting for events to take place inspired by the exhibition, perhaps talks from healthcare charities, or the artists themselves about their experiences.

One type of event this space would feature is *Red Legs*, a collage and conversation workshop, run by local student artists Lauren Evans and myself, Poppy Gilfillan.

Taking inspiration from the collage work of Wangechi Mutu featured within the *Gy(nae)co(logic)* exhibition. Originally hosted within DJCAD's Cooper Gallery, the workshop aims to 'create a healing space where you can turn your experiences with accessing healthcare and bodily conditions into tangible collage.' (Eventbrite, 2025) This perfectly fits the aims of the exhibition to raise awareness of women's experience living with health conditions and using art as a vehicle for this.



Fig 13

Own Photograph of **'Red Legs'** Workshop

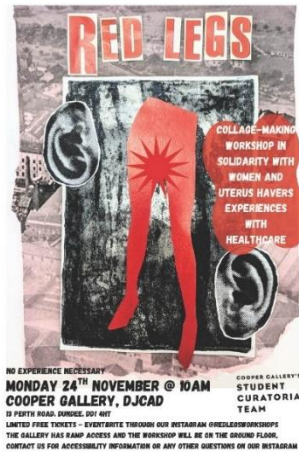


Fig 14

'Red Legs Workshop Poster',
Lauren Evans, 2025, Digital Poster

Chapter 3: Curatorial Influences

3.1 Content

As I detailed in my positionality statement, this exhibition was informed in part by my own experiences with the chronic condition endometriosis. My personal medical research to reach a more thorough understanding on my health, and also my research for my art practice as an artist who creates work around this subject, informed my decision making in terms of what artists I selected and the information I included.

Initially the first exhibition's which I took inspiration from were contemporary exhibits which touched on similar themes of women's health and bodily autonomy.

An exhibition which inspired the approach to the content of, and artists included in, *Gy(nae)co(logic)* was *Acts of Creation: on Art and Motherhood* at the DCA in Dundee, 2025. The DCA curator, Hettie Judah, talked about the importance of diversity of works in an interview, expressing; 'And indeed, one of the things that's been really interesting for me working on this exhibition has been to encounter experiences of motherhood very different from my own' (DCA Dundee, 2025). I wanted to approach another underrepresented area within women's health with the same dedication to different perspectives and experiences. *Gy(nae)co(logic)*, also shares two artists with this exhibit: Tracey Emin and Wangechi Mutu.

I was also deeply inspired by author and activist Audre Lorde's views on intersectionality's involvement of identity and care, which is the foundation to most- if not all of her writing. In her Essay *There is No Hierarchy of Oppressions*, Lorde says, 'And I cannot afford to choose between the fronts upon which I must battle these forces of discrimination, wherever they appear to destroy me. And when they appear to destroy me, it will not be long before they appear to destroy you.' (A. Lorde, 1983) The writer emphasises the importance of solidarity across communities for true progress to occur, with this in mind I wanted this exhibition to be accessible to everyone, regardless of race, nationality, physical ability or income and to interpret the artwork's messages in relation

to their own experiences with healthcare. I made sure to select a wheelchair accessible building, and to provide seating in every room.

3.2 Atmosphere

Though it may seem logical to host an exhibition surrounding health inside a building owned by a health organisation, this was a conscious decision not to. A key motivation to the venue choice and design of this exhibition was to differ to the layout of hospitals and doctors' offices, which are largely cold, clinical and for many women affected by long-term health conditions, not a place of healing. An article on *better architectural approaches to hospital buildings aiding patients' recovery*, stated: 'It is commonplace for people to say they feel depressed by the thought of hospitals and their associated images of windowless waiting rooms and long artificially lit corridors.' (Cullinan Studio, 2021)

A sense of safety and having an atmosphere which encourages empathy is deeply important when dealing with potentially triggering subject matter. The methods used to try and differ from these uninviting medical environments was to break the gallery up into smaller, cosier spaces, to use softer warmer lighting which don't encourage headaches, to use deep colours and fabric on the walls which make the viewer feel at home.

The environment in the final gallery space, 'The Internal Room', is inspired by the Cooper Gallery's *Compassionate Rebels in Action* by Grace Ndiritu, which contains a red room with an entirely mirrored wall and an upstairs seating and film viewing area. The space's goal is described: 'Through meditation, the aesthetics of protest and alternative communities, Ndiritu creates works that encourages deep reflection, shared 'learning of un-learning' and revolutionary action' (K. Clark, 2025)

I aim to replicate the intention of reflection and 'learning of un-learning' by replicating the mirrored surface within The Internal Room in the gallery, but instead as a floor feature to fit the display of the works better, using thematic colours within the rooms and also to have seating which grounds the viewers.



Fig 15

'Sit-in Curriculum #5, Compassionate Rebels in Action – Preview Event.', Photo by Sally Jubb, courtesy of Cooper Gallery, DJCAD, 2025



Fig 16

'Sit-in Curriculum #5: A Season of Peace Building', Photo by Sally Jubb, courtesy of Cooper Gallery, DJCAD, 2025

3.3 Interior Design

KIKI Voice- The Art Experience Curated by Bayer, was an exhibition in Thailand, 2024, tackling the taboo of the vagina. This exhibition made the space secluded by having coloured walls to separate the gallery from the outer building, as well as an almost curtain-like interactive entrance. This inspired me to make the space immersive using curtains separating the rooms and thematically colouring the walls.



Fig 17

'Exploring The Five Senses of Kiki', Bangkok Post, 2024, Still from YouTube Video

Saoirse Amira Anis' solo exhibition at the DCA in Dundee, *Symphony for a Fraying Body* Inspired me curatorially with the importance placed on comfortable and rotating seating to view film works. The artist spoke in a recorded interview about how they personally struggle with uncomfortable seating in gallery spaces, and that they 'Wanted to make sure that other people...with physical ailments were able to sit comfortably, without having to worry about their body' (DCA Dundee, 2023).

Another artist's exhibition which inspired the design of the seating within *Gy(nae)co(logic)*, and the floor externally within the rest of the gallery, is *The Passion Reading Room* by Tai Shani for the *Échelle Humaine festival* in Paris, 2023. I loved the way the carpeted circles became three-dimensional with the round velvet pillows, almost like the shape of blood platelets. I would commission Shani to collaborate with Anis, to create a carpet/floor-pasted imagery trail and seating inspired by screenprints from the book *SYMPHONY FOR A FRAYING BODY*: published as part of the exhibition.



Fig 18

'The Passion Reading Room',
Tai Shani, 2023, Floor Installation

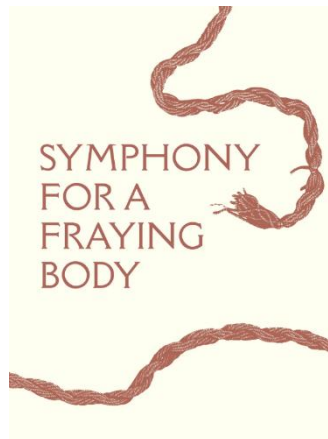


Fig 19

'Symphony For a Fraying Body', Saoirse Amira Anis,
2023, Publication Cover Art

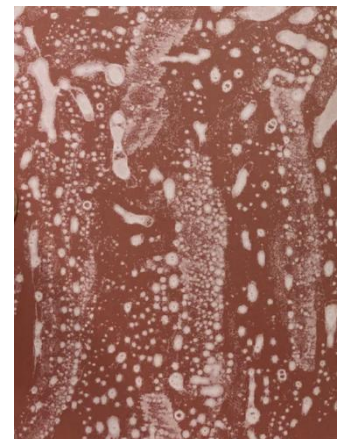


Fig 20

'Symphony For a Fraying Body', Saoirse Amira Anis,
2023, Publication inner page

THE WAITING ROOM



THE LIVING ROOM



THE INTERNAL ROOM



Conclusion

This proposal intends to summarise the therapeutic journey of 'Gy(nae)co(logic)', an exhibition in which the works of nine contemporary artists expand perspectives on the experience of navigating life and healthcare with a gynaecologic health condition. They tackle this subject, rebelling in the face of preconceived taboos in society, discrimination and their own health struggles causing limitations.

Gy(nae)co(logic) aims to be an experience that forms a relationship with the audience; that creates space for multiple perspectives and for the viewer question their sense of identity. In this way, the exhibition does not exist until it is interacted with and boundaries within the mind and body are pervaded, so it was difficult to curate without this live feedback of the public at the V&A.

I attempted to showcase the design and atmosphere of the gallery through digital mock-ups for a sense of realism in perspective, but perhaps it would've been more successful in displaying the scale of the works and how they relate to each other had I also created a three-dimensional model.

In accordance with Audre Lorde's writings on intersectionality, I hope for this exhibition to be accessible to all, regardless of artistic background, education levels or income. I believe the works can speak for themselves to stir thoughts and feelings within all viewers, and this was part of my reasoning of selected the pieces I did. Over half of the works, I chose to feature I have viewed in real life, which was another reason I felt so confident in their effects upon the viewer- I have experienced them myself.

Gy(nae)co(logic) was created as a way for me to work through my feelings towards my body and existing in a society that devalues it. It has left me with a broader overview of women's health and the higher purpose of connecting with others in a shared struggle for equality. I hope this message can be felt by everyone who experiences this exhibition.

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