

Letting My Hair Grow
Marlene Haring

The Function Room, London
23 February–15 March 2015

Catalogue

Works in the exhibition

- 1

Letting My Hair Grow

six-month performance, New York, 2006-2007

photograph, image size: 1100 × 620 mm, sheet size: 1200 × 730 mm

edition: 3 copies + 2 artist's proofs, produced 2010
- 2

Letting My Hair Grow (False Friends)

two figurines carved by Hans Stock (1929–2014), wood, 271 × 83 × 71 mm and 265 × 90 × 69 mm, 2011
- 3

False Friend (Long Chair)

LC4 chaise longue (designed by Charlotte Perriand, named for Le Corbusier): tubular steel, leather, plumber's hemp, 160 × 70 × 56 cm, 2009
- 4

Report to an Academy

paperback book, 64 pages, 110 × 180 mm, published 2015





- 1 *Letting My Hair Grow*, 2006–2007/2010 (above)
- 2 *Letting My Hair Grow (False Friends)*, 2011 (next spread)







Above: Designer Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999) posed on the LC4, 1928

Opposite: Catalogue article for the exhibition *The Seen and the Hidden: (Dis)covering the Veil*, curated by David Harper, Martha Kirszenbaum and Karin Meisel at the Austrian Cultural Forum, New York (22 May–29 August 2009), pp. 38–39

Next spread: Marlene Haring, *Wrinkly?* photograph, 2013

Marlene Haring: *False Friend (Long Chair)*

Katarina V. Posch, 2009

With her *False Friend (Long Chair)*, Marlene Haring turns a Modernist icon into a multilayered work of art. The installation is based on the ‘LC4’ chaise longue, named after the Swiss pioneer of modern design, Le Corbusier. When it was conceived and the prototype built in 1927, the LC4 was one of the first designs to bring tubular steel furniture into the home. Its industrial appearance signified the idea of ‘domestic equipment’ for a ‘machine for living’ – Le Corbusier’s notion of the modern house. Still produced today, it has become a lasting symbol of Modernism itself.

The Modernist credo emphasized mass-production for a middle- or working class public, rationalization, standardization, the international, the functional, and the male. By contrast, the initial conception of the chaise longue as a furniture type goes back to a time with very different spirit: it was developed during the Rococo era to serve the relaxed, social, conversational and sensual lifestyle of the aristocracy. The chaise longue was inspired by the oriental way of lounging and became popular with women; thus it came to be associated with the private, the sensual, the exotic, and the female – qualities which were considered old-fashioned (reactionary) and usually avoided by radical Modernist designers of the twentieth century.

Interestingly enough, the LC4 was not designed by Le Corbusier but by his employee, the young Charlotte Perriand, one of the few women who would leave their mark on modern design. The ten-year professional relationship between Le Corbusier and Perriand was, not surprisingly, marked by gender-related tensions. The famous picture of her posing on the chaise longue suggests her ambiguous role in a modern world: Perriand exposes her legs and her neck in a rather provocative way, but does not let us gaze upon her hair (which was cut daringly short) or upon her face – almost as if she were hiding behind an oriental veil. The picture conveys a tension between proactive seduction and traditional modesty.

In contrast to the ‘industrial’ structure of the chaise longue, Perriand originally upholstered it in pony skin or leather-trimmed canvas (Hermès-style): both sensual and luxurious materials. Thus Perriand succeeded in creating a perfect balance between rationality and sensuality, between mass-production and luxury, between male and female, between control and indulgence.

Marlene Haring overthrows this equilibrium. Her cover of sensual, luxurious masses of hair offers a voyeuristic gaze upon what is usually kept trimmed or hidden. Some female Modernists favored short hair and promoted it as a sign of liberation, although the cutting of hair belongs to both Western pre-modern and Eastern traditions, which considered exposed hair to be a sign of the free, but required women who were bound by marriage, by serfdom, or by religious oaths to cover or cut off their hair. Marlene Haring’s *False Friend (Long Chair)* thus unveils the chaise longue’s hidden signs of patriarchal inequality, and becomes a critical statement on Modernism itself.



It's hard to get the perspective of an outsider – it feels like a forensic report, but emotional. It feels mythical yet precisely real. It shows the power and violence (or potential to overthrow violence) of detail and description ... as also of the performer as object and resister of objectification, who plays with objectification.

Haring robs her protagonist (the cult performance artist) of her persona by dissecting her performed presence through precise description of the situation's component details. Like Muybridge's study of a horse, she discovers how the majestic beast gallops. Facts burst the magic trick (the system) but create new mysteries (we see behind the mask for the first time). Obsessive description shifts the reader from an embodied human perspective to a disorientated one; a perspective made up of close-ups, altered scales and multiple viewpoints. The character is made human again, so that the system itself can be held to account.

The precision of the observations clashes with the uncertainty about exactly who is being described and where. Is this a real account, or fictional? By piecing together forensic clues, we get the sense that it is a factual document, yet the described character's true identity remains questionable – she stands for all leaders. Description is a form of dissection that affects the system without destroying the individual subject – the way microscopic insects might dissect tissues of the body with violent tenderness, whilst symbiotically rejuvenating it organ by organ. A judo player channels his opponent's own force and uses it to become part of him – a monster of mingled limbs and subjectivities. In that moment of struggle, all orders and systems are replaced by questions.

This text does something similar. It is absurd yet methodical; satirical yet serious.

Since her time at the Royal College of Art, Haring has been using grains and greens to bring large groups of people together over lunch. Her sculpture lunches were the staple of the 2013 graduation show installation period. Basic executions in big pots brought colleagues out of segregated physical and mental spaces, gathering them around long tables. With warm, unusually spiced food, Haring nourished a community that would have frayed had it had to survive three weeks' hard work on individual sandwiches from the college's Café Royale.

A March Sunday afternoon in Somers Town has little in common with a summer show, and the Cock Tavern, above which is situated Marlene Haring's and Anthony Auerbach's current space, The Function Room, has little in common with the Royal College of Art. Walk into the Cock Tavern on any afternoon and you will find a regular constellation of mostly male pensioners, early-off-work street cleaners and keen gamblers propping up the bar and its four taps of Grolsch, Fosters, Carling and Guinness. By way of food, you are most likely to find the leftover sandwich corners from this week's wake, the RMT Christmas party chicken satay, or a packet of cheese and onion crisps. Make your way upstairs beyond the crackling fire and you'll find yourself in The Function Room. Half renovated and half crumbling, with paint peeling off the ceiling, the Function Room is a sun-lit, white-walled exhibition space that has not forgotten the actual functional past that remains its present. Chairs are stacked ready for the next union meeting and a pin board advertises current activity: the Connolly Association Easter Fundraiser (a night of Celtic Punk), a campaign to sack Bob Lambert (who, according to the leaflet, is now a London Metropolitan University lecturer, was formerly a Metropolitan Police spy boss, 'agent provocateur, abuser of women', apparently in charge of the under cover police revealed to have had relationships and children with members of the protest groups that they were supposed to spy on – groups that met upstairs at the Cock Tavern), a flyer for the Radical Anthropology Group's Spring 2015 syllabus of weekly evening classes, and a notice about the current exhibition: Marlene Haring's *Letting My Hair Grow*.

On this Sunday 8 March, perhaps not coincidentally International Women's Day, Haring's exhibition awaits an audience and a performance. A book is propped open at the side of a chaise longue overgrown with long blond hair. Behind it hangs Haring's *Letting My Hair Grow*: a photograph of the artist letting her hair down, covering face, torso, down to a loosely gripped towel, above which peep abundant pubes. The picture is unexpectedly hung on its side, as if a reclining totem. To the left stand two small wooden figurines Haring calls *False Friends* – perplexing, or far-fetched representations of the same image carved by the octogenarian Hans Stock high up in the Tyrolean Alps.

Lunch is similarly loosely and confidently gripped. As guests arrive, they are welcomed at a table weighed down with food, to sit at and help themselves. Pearl barley and lentils are folded into a lemony dhal. Wholemeal millet – sticky, light and dense from ghee and delicate spices – is piqued with green chillies. Za'atar lifts a creamy hummus out of the doldrums. Chairs are pushed back as people arrive with pint glasses in hand in dribs and drabs, greeting



4 *Report to an Academy* by Marlene Haring
London: Vargas Organistion, 2015

equally strangers and people they know. Cheese, fresh herbs, cherry tomatoes and salad are distributed across the tables and plates are piled high. People eat, enjoy, chat, casually move from chair to chair. A small group of children clusters on the floor playing Jenga.

Half way through this delicately convivial Sunday scene, reclining upon the hairy chaise, Haring's performance begins: a reading from her latest published work *Report to an Academy*, and the occasion of today's lunch.

Imagine: you take a deep breath in, your tongue slightly curled, touching the gum behind your lower teeth, you breathe in through your mouth. Then you breathe out through your opened lips; you are satisfied; your tongue is relaxed. You breathe in, you breathe out, in this way. You are resting comfortably in a soft, luxurious leather arm chair, which easily holds the weight of your heavy body. Your left hand is resting on your voluminous belly, over which are stretched your underwear, your shirt, your waistcoat. You do not see your thighs. While you breathe in through your yellow-stained teeth, your belly expands, and on it your left hand rises with it. The skin of your hand shows signs of ageing. You breathe out, your belly's circumference shrinks. You breathe in and out and your hand moves with the rhythm of your breath. You are completely, deeply relaxed ...

Amidst mouthfuls of citrus-dense barley, the hypnotic, instructional text breathes critical thought into her listeners and readers in a manner that engenders pleasure. The conjunction of pleasure and critique feels neither ideological nor awkward, but more a necessary and true state of co-habitation. To this reviewer, the menu, like the reading, the gathering and the way this art space and pub cohabit feel practical, pragmatic and economic. In my grandmother's manner, but without the custard.

I can't lie. I did hesitate on the threshold. Could this place really be worth my time? What eating experience could ingratiate me to the smell of The Cock Tavern – cat, stale beer and ash? After an afternoon of performance, lunch, sweet sticky dates, more beer and conversation, waved good-bye by the landlady, I leave with the visual imprint of the carpet and the smell of firewood. I have been ingratiated – by the millet, the commitment to sharing, Haring's memorable dhal and an exhibition of consistent generosity and hairy contestations.

Related works

- 1

Marlene Haarig oder in meiner Badewanne bin ich Kapitän!
(*Marlene Hairy or In My Bathtub I am the Captain*)

performance, Vienna, 6 June 2005
- 2

Wegen Schambehaarung geschlossen (Closed Because of Pubic Hair)

monumental pavilion, plumber’s hemp at the main entrance, table reservation
(installation: Secession, Vienna, 2009)
- 3

Letting My Hair Grow (Draußen wachsen [Growing Outside])

monumental pavilion, banner, 4 × 7 m (installation: Secession, Vienna, 2010, collection: Österreichische Galerie Belvedere); photograph (edition of 3 + 2 artist’s proofs, image size 350 × 235 mm, sheet size: 510 x 415 mm, produced 2011)
- 4

History Replacement, or why it’s better not to mention Freud in Vienna, or how, when I suggested doing something with the staircase that was removed from the old 20er Haus and put in to storage when the building was converted to the 21er Haus, how I was told, after a long silence, that it should never be mentioned, and how I got the new house to get out from its own storage and show, among other hairy things, a work of mine that once grew outside, but, nevertheless, how I’m still thinking about descending a staircase.

(Ersatzgeschichte oder warum man Freud in Wien besser nicht erwähnt, oder, wie mir, als ich vorschlug, etwas mit dem alten Stiegenaufgang des 20er Hauses zu machen, der beim Umbau entfernt worden war und seither gelagert wird, nach langer Stille mitgeteilt wurde, dass dieser niemals erwähnt werden sollte, und wie ich nun stattdessen das 21er Haus dazu brachte, eine meiner Arbeiten, die einmal draußen wuchs, aus seinem Lager hervorzuholen und neben anderen haarigen Dingen zu zeigen, ich aber nichtsdestoweniger immer noch daran denke, eine Treppe herabzusteigen.)

five works, title plaques (installation: 21er Haus, Vienna, part of BC21 Art Award 2013 nominated artists exhibition)





1 *Marlene Haarig oder in meiner Badewanne bin ich Kapitän!*
(*Marlene Hairy or In My Bathtub I am the Captain*), 2005

In Her Bathtub, She's the Captain Julia Wayne, 2005

The long-blond-haired creature sleeping on the pavement at the street-corner rendezvous outside the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts did not greet the more or less informed audience, but set off at surprising speed on all fours into the park. The assorted audience followed as the creature made its way through the greenery towards the Prater (Vienna's permanent fun-fair), past Autodrome, Space Shot, Ghost Train and Casino Admiral, emerging on Austellungsstrasse (Exhibition Road) and crossing into the neighbourhood known as the Stuwerviertel, where Marlene Haring lives.

This diverse and slightly run-down area of Vienna's 'Second District' is also one of the city's red light districts. Such a large group of people, apparently strolling behind an unnameable animal and accompanied by various camera crews and photographers did not fail to make an exhibition of itself. The creature led the crowd into a vacant shop nicely equipped with a dilapidated Alpine landscape wallpaper, where they were greeted by another photographer who announced, 'Group photo!' and lined everyone up appropriately for the picture behind the trophy or mascot.

The by-now perplexed, harassed or delighted audience may or may not have registered a series of interventions along the way including posters by CHEEK, signs by Julia Wayne and a naked running man by Mahony. Although some were left behind apparently in confusion, the creature led about fifty people to Marlene's flat where it entered the bathroom and closed the door, not before placing a notice reading, 'Wer mit mir reden will, soll mit mir baden' (If you want to talk with me, you have to bathe with me').

Beer was served and art works shown including CHEEK's *Face by Cheek*, Stefanie Seibold's video *Oh Bondage*, Julia Wayne's *Gemütliches Traumservice* (a sign the by-now art audience might have noticed advertising a 'discreet' service in a window on the way, reapplied by Julia in reverse on a large mirror) and Marlene Haring's *Weil jedes Haar anders ist!* (*Because Every Hair is Different*). Some people got into the bath to talk to the hairy creature.



2 *Wegen Schambehaarung geschlossen* (Closed Because of Pubic Hair), 2009

Marlene Haring's lecture *Wegen Schambehaarung geschlossen* was announced as part of a series of talks on the idea of freedom organised by the historic Vienna Secession artists' association. On arriving, the audience was informed that the Secession was indeed closed because of pubic hair, and that 'zwangloses Gespräch' (informal discussion, literally: unforced speech) would take place in a nearby café.





3 *Letting My Hair Grow (Draußen wachsen [Growing Outside])*, 2010/2011

The banner *Letting My Hair Grow (Draußen wachsen [Growing Outside])* was installed in the portico of the Secession building, Vienna from 2 July to 29 August 2010. An edition of the photograph was produced in 2011.



4 *History Replacement, or why it's better not to mention Freud in Vienna, or how, when I suggested doing something with the staircase that was removed from the old 20er Haus and put in to storage when the building was converted to the 21er Haus, how I was told, after a long silence, that it should never be mentioned, and how I got the new house to get out from its own storage and show, among other hairy things, a work of mine that once grew outside, but, nevertheless, how I'm still thinking about descending a staircase*, 2013

The installation was part of BC21 Art Award 2013 nominated artists' exhibition at 21er Haus (the contemporary department of the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna) comprised five works and six title plaques.

Above, left: *The Crown*, 2010 (local newspaper dated 4 August 2010)

Above, middle: *Letting My Hair Grow (Draußen wachsen [Growing Outside])*, 2011 (the photograph of the earlier installation in the portico of the Secession building, Vienna, now in the collection of Österreichische Galerie Belvedere)



- 4 *History Replacement, or why it's better not to mention Freud in Vienna, or how, when I suggested doing something with the staircase that was removed from the old 20er Haus and put in to storage when the building was converted to the 21er Haus, how I was told, after a long silence, that it should never be mentioned, and how I got the new house to get out from its own storage and show, among other hairy things, a work of mine that once grew outside, but, nevertheless, how I'm still thinking about descending a staircase, 2013*



Opposite and above right: *Letting My Hair Grow (Draußen wachsen [Growing Outside])*, 2010 (the banner previously installed in the portico of the Secession building and now in the collection of the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere).

Above, left: *Because Every Hair is Different*, 2005/2013 (3 billboards, offset-litho on paper, mounted on wood). The image was first shown as part of *Marlene Haarig oder in meiner Badewanne bin ich Kapitän! (Marlene Hairy or In My Bathtub I am the Captain)*, 2005, see above. A 9-sheet billboard poster was produced in 2007.

Above, screen on the floor: *On the Internet, Everybody Knows You're an Afghan Hound*, 2013 (captured web pages, javascript, variable dimensions). Endless scroll of thousands of web pages using, abusing and otherwise appropriating without authorisation Marlene Haring's image *Because Every Hair is Different*.
<http://internet.marleneharing.com/afghan/hound.php>

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