

# HYPERALLERGIC

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From Car Hoods to Vajazzling

By Claire Breukel



Frances Goodman's "Revenge Series" (all images courtesy the artist unless otherwise noted)

It's the first Frieze Art Fair in New York and everyone took an excited and speculative deep breathe in anticipation of what is expected to be the next best thing. Not so for South African artist Frances Goodman who is in New York for three months as part of the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP). In her cool and understated South Africa accent she comments, "I don't really care that much for art fairs, there's too much fuss to be able to see the artwork properly." She is unapologetic about her reluctance towards art fairs. In fact, I discover in the few days of following her around that Frances Goodman doesn't apologize about much when it comes to art.



Frances Goodman chatting to South African gallerist and print specialist David Krut at his Chelsea gallery. (photo by the author)

Playing the “tough chic” artist in a climate like South Africa is not always an easy task. With entrenched stereotypes that favor conformity and the norms of marriage to individualism and free expression, it can feel like a lonely enterprise making art that brushes up against these conventions. This is why Goodman comes out of the gate swinging and in the process making works with provocative titles, like “Love Smells Death,” “Antenuptual Contract” and “Revenge Series,” all of which make strong and succinct commentaries on the notion of marriage.

Text is a big feature in her work and she creates slogans that are open-ended enough to question while offering an assertive provocation. It is Goodman’s undertaking to maintain this assertiveness, viewing her work as a vehicle for liberation — sometimes engaging actual audience members in performances — from social conformity.

Changing preconceptions is no small task, so Goodman starts her days at Gleason’s Gym in Brooklyn’s Dumbo neighborhood warming up with a bout of boxing. Once she lands some punches and she feels the buzz of energy circulating in her limbs, she heads to the studio to get to work — hers is no normal workday.



Frances Goodman in studio drilling holes into a car hood.

First on her agenda is the search for a car hood to be used in her ongoing Revenge Series that begun as part of her 2010 solo exhibition Till Death Us Do Part at Goodman Gallery (no relation) in Johannesburg. Once the bonnet, as they’re known to South Africans, has been found, Goodman embeds phrases onto the surface using pop-rivets, scratching and drilling.

Each of the works in the series have their own unique character and her latest addition, which is as an ode to her New York residency, will be distinctly American. The artist heads down the road

to the nearest tow-trucking facility in search of a lead. There she meets three tow truck drivers, all of whom she remarks are called Frankie. At first they are reluctant to help, but after a month of persistent visits and project explanations (Goodman is not one to give up easily), they resolve to finally take her to a junkyard in search of the right piece.

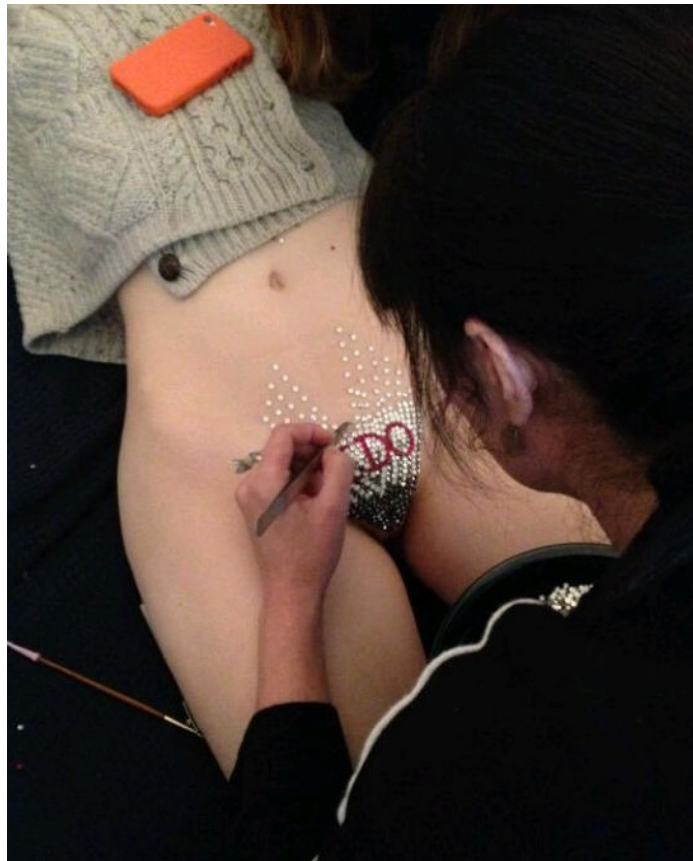
“I’ve spent a lot of time with these guys now and they kept asking why I don’t have a boyfriend to help me do this stuff,” she says with a smile.

She talks openly, loosely using the word feminist to describe her activist sensibility, but subtexts this with the acknowledgement that the word itself needs to be associated with contemporary notions of feminism and also be more inclusive. Now, after days of hanging about tow truck drivers and talking about all sorts of things, they finally decide to give her dating advice.

Yesterday Frankie sent me this text message: told toilet ur hair down and talk 2 guys Don’t be hard be easy... just not 2 easy yet lol,” Goodman says.

In addition to free advice the drivers finally help the artist source a “classy dodge bonnet with a very nice grill on it,” as she describes it. After her find, she’s begins the process of drilling a series of holes into which she will insert a series of LED lights to illuminate the words.

What’s it going to say? X “the crazy bitch. ” With a phrase like that you can’t but wonder about all the possible subtexts.



Frances Goodman "Vajazzling" her model.

Goodman's use of text takes on a shortened though no less potent form in another more "personal" series she is simultaneously working on using the current trend of decorating ones genitalia, aka Vajazzling. "Dressing" her models in an array of glitter and jewels, Goodman photographs their bodies in a manner akin to that of 20th C. American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, cropping the body views between waste and upper thigh. This gives a life-size full frontal view of the bikini area with jewels that carefully spell out the words "I DO." It seems to give a whole new interpretation to the words blushing bride.

I could imagine these causing quite a stir in an art fair setting — but in line with Goodman's dislike for the fairs — the response is likely to be fragmented and the work interpreted at face value. What is clear is that there is more to her work than a pristine contemporary aesthetic and sassy provocation.

Frances Goodman's new works will be on exhibition during the ISCP Spring Open Studios (1040 Metropolitan Avenue, East Williamsburg, Brooklyn) opening on Friday May 11, 7–9pm. The open studio event will continue on Saturday, May 12 and Sunday, May 13 from 1–7pm.