

pink things

Frances Goodman On Contemporary Art, Acrylic Nails, And Feminism

26 Oct – 23 Dec 2017 at the Richard Taittinger Gallery in
New York, United States

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Frances Goodman is one of my all-time favorite artists. There's just something about her intense and unabashedly feminine artwork that leaves me feeling empowered and fuzzy inside. Frances has a new collection of work at Richard Taittinger Gallery, on view through December 23. Titled *Beneath Her*, Frances's latest solo show is all about what's underneath. When I spoke to Frances at the opening (she's amazing by the way), she described to me the intense process behind each and every detailed work, as well as her migration to the color red from pink (keep reading, she tells you about it here too!). Frances agreed to a digital interview after returning to South Africa, and our conversation is what follows.

Sarah Sickles for Pink Things: *Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Some background info about who you are and how you got into art?*

Frances Goodman: I'm an artist living and working in Johannesburg, South Africa. I always wanted to be an artist, even as a young child it was the only thing I ever dreamt of doing. Luckily, my family has always been very supportive of my adamant dream and, as it's the only thing I think I was meant to do, I did everything in my power to make it happen.

Pink Things: *Can you tell me about your fascination with acrylic nails? Why use acrylic nails as a sculpture medium? How do they inform your practice?*

Frances Goodman: I am fascinated with acrylic nails as they refer to both the object and the aesthetic. They are alluring but repulsive, strong but brittle, sexy but dangerous. I like to use them in both a painterly and sculptural way; when I lay them down side by side, they become so slick and seductive – they allude to scales, liquid, and armor. I keep being surprised by what I can do to them, how they can be transformed. It reminds me of our constantly shifting notions of the feminine and femininity and that's what draws me to them.

Pink Things: *Can you tell me a little bit about how pink plays a role in your work, conceptually or otherwise?*

Frances Goodman: When I was growing up in the late 80's, there was a specific fierce, feminine pink that was the craze in posters and makeup that I loved. I find myself working with this pink and shades thereof over and over again in my work. Perhaps it's

nostalgia, or maybe that pink coincided with my feminine and feminist awakening and that's why I use it. But ultimately pink alludes to the body – rosy cheeks, the inside of the mouth and tongue, the nipple, the labia, and even the vagina; and as my work is all about femininity and the female body, it seems like an apt color to work with.

Pink Things: *When we spoke you mentioned that you were moving on to red as well. What inspired that migration of color?*

Frances Goodman: For me, pink always refers to the external body, the parts I mentioned above. Red makes me think of beneath the surface: the blood, flesh, sinew, and muscle we are made up of. My current exhibition *Beneath Her* is about the surface and what lies beneath; how we rework and manipulate the body in order to perfect the surface. So it made complete sense to predominately use red for this.

There is another reason too – I always work with nail colors that are trending at the time of production and I saw that when I put all the popular colors together they became the bloody reds you see in the new works. I love the fact that these individually pop and vibrant colors become so much more ominous and abject when put together en masse. It makes me think of the femininity I am trying to explore – one that is complex, assertive, and dangerous.

Pink Things: *My favorite piece in your latest show, Beneath Her, at Richard Taittinger Gallery is the massive woven piece, Comforter. Can you tell me about the inspiration for that piece and how it came to exist?*

Frances Goodman: I'm also very excited about this installation, as it's the first time I've worked with wool and crochet so it was a real challenge to work with a new material on such a grand scale. Luckily my assistant, Jacky, is a crochet expert and together we worked out, piece-by-piece, how to make the monster that is *Comforter*.

For the exhibition *Beneath Her* I chose to work with an array of historical crafting techniques such as quilting, crochet, and embroidery to explore the motifs of the surface and what lies beneath. However, I wanted to take these traditionally homely and domestic pastimes and, in keeping with historical and present feminist craft art practices, subvert them.

When I think of crochet and knitting I always think of warm, wooly blankets made by grannies. I also think of women, with too much time on their hands, sitting together in knitting circles. The title “Comforter” of course refers to a blanket, but it’s also a play on words – it could be “comfort her” if said a little differently. Blankets are comforting, the pastimes of knitting and crocheting are also comforting, and perhaps the womb-like space could also be comforting. I decided to make a giant, comforting blanket that becomes something ominous and overwhelming, that consumes and subsumes the viewer: a labor-of-love that becomes an obsession.

Pink Things: *Do you have a relationship with feminism? Could you tell me about it?*

Frances Goodman: I don’t think of it as a relationship: I contend that feminism is a non-negotiable political stance I have to take in the current and historical climate where equality is a pipedream. I find myself feeling constantly angry and frustrated by how women are treated, represented, paid, and abused, and this is what motivates a lot of my work and practice.



Pink Things: *What about the feminine? I feel so much “girl power”, for lack of a better term, radiating from your work. Can you tell me about how your relationship with the feminine impacts your work? What is your interest in it?*

Frances Goodman: I am interested in the feminine as there is constant debate around femininity being a gender construct or an inherent female trait. We, as women, are bombarded with images of acceptable femininity and taught that we need to desire and aspire to certain ideals and aesthetics in order to be seen as normal, beautiful, and successful. As soon as we start challenging or pushing back against these norms we become unruly, strange, and disgusting. I am interested in how possible it really is to escape from this indoctrination, if it is that. And if it's really possible to find the essential female self and what that would be or look like.

Pink Things: *Lets talk about those AMAZING sequined paintings. Why sequins? And why the subject matter?*

Frances Goodman: There are a number of reasons why I work with sequins. I am always drawn to things that sparkle, that have an element of kitsch to them, and what is more glitzy and glamorous and garish than sequins? I also work with things that women use to adorn themselves with, and sequins are a wonderful example of this. Sequins are also the epitome of the surface and our obsession therewith.

I decided to make ‘paintings’ with sequins as they allow me the possibility to work up great detail with their beautiful array of colors. However, their reflective and refractory nature makes it difficult to view the images as a whole. As you move about a room the image is continually changing; areas of the painting come into focus whilst others dissolve. They're like a mirage – constantly unattainable.

As for the subject matter: I originally started working with found images of women in films, but very quickly decided that I should take the photographs myself in order to direct the poses and settings. I photograph women I know or are known to me in a cinematic way, in order to speak of the way women are framed, stereotyped, and idealized through film. Actresses and models have become icons for everyday women, representing the unattainable perfection we are continuously and unsuccessfully seeking.

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Pink Things: *I LOVE the clit-looking pieces. They're so attractive, but almost menacing. Can you talk to me about how sexuality influences you, or any comments that you have on the matter, since it's so heavily for debate as of late?*

Frances Goodman: Sex and nudity are the tools used by many industries to seduce us into buying their products and ethos. What interests me is the polemic that is presented to women – we need to be sexy and seductive in order to be desired, but we need to be chastened and de-sexualised in order to be taken seriously. Why is that? I choose to work with sexuality and nudity, firstly, because the only way to reclaim power is to own it yourself, but secondly, because working with them directly brings to the forefront the problematics of representation and challenges one to question the intent behind the use of such images.

Pink Things: *What's next for Frances Goodman?*

Frances Goodman: I need to take a trip down the beauty isle soon in order to come up with some new ideas, but right now I am continuing to work with the new themes I explored in my New York exhibition as I am sure there is still a lot of ground to cover.