

**Utica, New York**

**Cristin Millet**

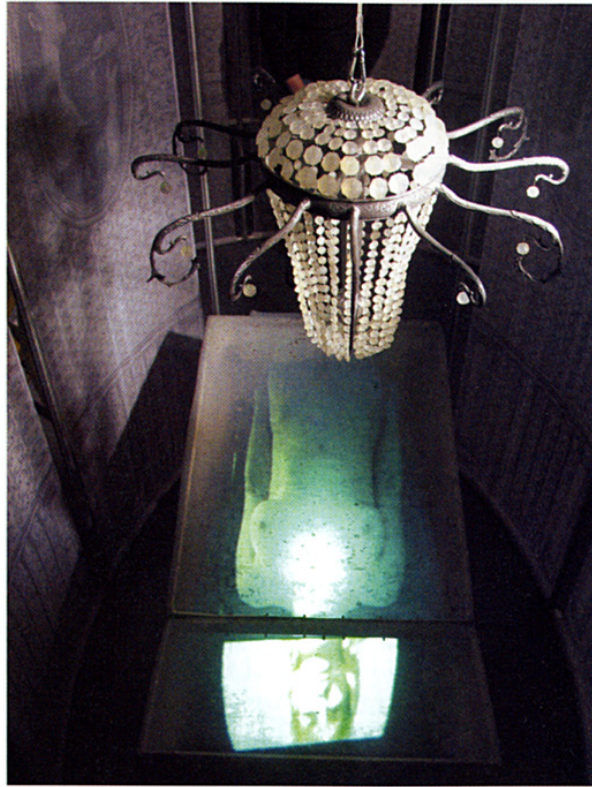
**Sculpture Space**

After a three-month residency at Sculpture Space in Utica, Cristin Millet completed a major installation titled *Teatro Anatomico*. Based on surgical lecture halls, Millet's self-contained labyrinthine space is defined by three concentric ellipses, eight feet high and 22 feet deep at the widest part. A lightweight aluminum framework supports 49 sheer white chiffon panels onto which black ink-jet images of a wall paper pattern have been transferred. The imprint of a banister telescopes downward to suggest the steep slope of an amphitheater. Within the nucleus, a heavily beaded organic form glows and a table emits a cold blue light. Viewed from a distance, the softly lit translucent layers of fabric create an ethereal presence and suggestively erotic oasis within the Sculpture Space studio, an industrial workspace that supports the creation and exhibition of new work.

Closer examination of the outside layer of panels reveals a series of oval-framed figures taken from ancient texts—women in a variety of poses who exhibit their reproductive organs. Inside, the time frame changes to a Renaissance gallery of aestheticized metaphors for reproductive aberrations including Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, St. Agatha with her breasts on a plate, and Leonardo's *Leda and the Swan*. Arriving at the central chamber, one encounters a steel examination table with a thick transparent silicone mat containing the life-size video projection of a woman's body undergoing surgery. In a virtual twisting of identity, a small camera captures and projects the head of the viewer, standing at the foot of the table, onto the body. The chandelier overhead is hand-carved and cast in aluminum, with hand-cut vinyl crystals outlining the cone shape of a cervix with characteristic fallopian tentacles

arching from the upper rim. The installation path concludes with a ghostly recording of a common but contentious procedure, a woman having her uterus removed. The formal construction within the close, curtained space creates a claustrophobic atmosphere with medical overtones bordering on the fetishistic.

smithing and jewelry is apparent in the intelligent choice of materials, obsessive attention to detail, and impressive handskills. In *Pot au Feu* (1996), a life-sized wax model of a one-legged soup pot containing a horned womb, she has fashioned a caricature of the "obstetrical phantom" once used by midwives to practice birthing babies.



**Cristin Millet, installation view of *Teatro Anatomico*, 2004, with *Lightening*, cast aluminum, and cast vinyl rubber crystals, 18 x 18 x 18 in.; and *Abdominal Hysterectomy: Dissection of the Observer*, modified exam table, cast silicone rubber, video projection, and live stream imagery, 3 x 4 x 2 ft.**

Millet states, "My research focuses on our eternal fascination with the human reproductive system and changing perceptions of female anatomy." A serious student of science and medicine from a gendered perspective, she has produced elegant and witty objects and environments that combine religious icons, medical instruments, and domestic artifacts. Her background in metal-

From the 16th-century Italian anatomist Andreas Vesalius to the 21st-century German pathologist Gunther von Hagen, who produces "sculpture" from plasticized corpses, the history of human anatomy presents a chain of ethical and emotional debates persisting to this day. The study of anatomy also charts the history of cultural enlightenment and the

resurrection of the human body from the shadow of creationism. In *Teatro Anatomico*, the gynecological illustrations, while fertile ground for feminist excavation, are disconnected and do not provide a pedagogical picture. In the end, this imbalance serves to highlight the deeply felt personal narrative contained in the central chamber.

—Gina Murtagh

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# Sculpture