

DYSMORPHIA PLAYGROUND ARTIST STATEMENT

Masculinity has had a makeover, visually, aesthetically and psychologically, from Bondi bros to hipster bromances, the Aussie bloke has been transformed into a self aware, groomed, buffed, image conscious, product-consuming, marketing dream.

We live in an age of image proliferation. Visual media constantly bombards us across multiple platforms, from print and television to computers and mobile phones. Young, handsome, athletic models and celebrity endorsements of products and services abound. Masculinity has been transformed into a well-dressed, moisturised, fragranced, fit, fashionable, consumable brand.

Mark Simpson has described the progression of this new masculinity, from the product prone "metrosexual to the gym toned, sporty "spornosexual" of today. According to Simpson, spornosexual men boast "painstakingly pumped and chiseled bodies, muscle-enhancing tattoos, piercings, adorable beards and plunging necklines...their own bodies have become the ultimate accessories". The male body has become a commodified, marketing tool.

The male fashion and grooming industry has now outstripped the female in terms of revenue and profit. This burgeoning market is attracting major attention from the world of big business attracted to the high disposable income and aspirational nature of the image conscious, consumer driven, media savvy, new man.

Media portrays the ideal image of men to be muscular and by implication strong, tough and stoic. However the pressure to obtain and maintain the body beautiful portrayed by these images has led to an increase in body dissatisfaction for men and young adults. Almost 18 percent of men are very concerned about their own physique and feel pressured to gain weight and become more toned. They were significantly more likely to become depressed and take part in behaviors like alcohol, steroid and drug use. Suicide is now the leading cause of death for Australian men aged 15-44 and male suicide rates are three times that of women. It appears the pressure to look, act, and harden up may be making some men crack.

The "Dysmorphia Playground" series comprises photorealistic charcoal drawings of crumpled paper and plastic bags for major fashion brands with a male audience. The brands commonly use young, male models both in store, in print and on packaging to promote their marketing brand.

However in the drawings the disposable bags are crumpled and distorted, the image printed on their surface twisted and transformed reflecting the aspirational and often unobtainable nature of the body beautiful promoted by the advertising industry.

In a similar vein celebrity endorsements attach a glamorous cache to a brand. The consumer perceives an association between a brand and a celebrity that they admire and relate to, resulting in purchasing products from that brand. David Beckham is the ultimate male, celebrity brand. A working class footballer and all round good bloke he is a walking advertisement to the aspirations of the male audience.

The **“Dysmorphia Playground”** exhibition will examine the constructs and tropes of masculinity and the male body in the early 21st century.