

# BigMinis

*Fetishes of crisis*

## Featuring works by

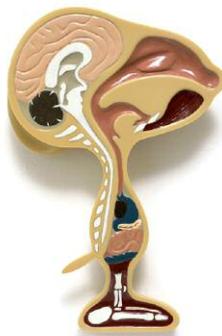
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Richard Hawkins  
Karl Holmqvist  
David Hominal  
Jonathan Horowitz  
Dean Hughes  
Des Hughes  
Patrick Jackson  
Paul Johnson

Thomas Julier  
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Klat  
John Kleckner  
Terence Koh  
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Erika Verzutti  
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Eric Wesley  
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special: Grace Jones

## Press Kit



**CAPC**

musée d'art contemporain  
de Bordeaux

# BigMinis

*Fetishes of crisis*

19 November 2010 / 27 February 2011

**Are the mini and smallness a portent of crisis, or a reflection, a consequence thereof? Might they also be an effective and off-kilter response to THE crisis? With the exhibition *BigMinis*, the CAPC's idea is to explore the special fascination wielded by the "scaled-down" object in a period of recession. While miniaturization may conjure up lower costs, less time, and less space, the production of the mini is, for its part, strategic. The mini resists reduction and scaling-down. It exists because of its small size. A cheeky smallness which reveals, in the current economic and cultural context, some of the capitalist pathologies in which the mini originates, and to which it responds. Is the mini a regulatory object?**

The exhibition *BigMinis* brings together works by some 50 contemporary artists, on loan from public collections in France and abroad, private foundations and collections, galleries, and the artists themselves. The idea, which originates in the present-day economic state of affairs, unfolds against a backdrop of recession, and questions, in particular, the notion of "fetishes of crisis."

It is wrongly thought that in the mini, everything is proportionately scaled down: so the same might apply to the idea behind it, and its impact. Experience shows the opposite, however. The mini endures and marks. It apparently even withstands crisis. This exhibition is conceived with this in mind. In order to make the idea dialectical and spicy, large works informed by mini-ideas are also on view, thus indicating that the impact of an idea conveyed by an object is not proportionate to the latter's size. Otherwise put, the large works are far from having a monopoly on "big" ideas and small ideas are not necessarily proportionate to the size of the objects conveying them.

Bearing in mind the maximalist proportions of the CAPC, to which the exhibition makes a partial response, an arrangement had to be invented, with the *bigminis* not really being exhibited as standards. The *new formula* gallery on the museum's ground floor will look like a mental playground. And it will sometimes be necessary to look for the works amid a forest of stands with a post-Tetris look about them.

The minis are not aware of the canons of the day and age. One-off mini-artworks, if they may be so pigeonholed, are as if driven by life. It does not matter much if they are beautiful or ugly. Their dimensions and materials, as well as their technical and conceptual prowess makes them enviable and engaging, and stimulating for eye and mind alike. They surprise and impose themselves. Nothing can be taken away from them. Their impact goes so far as to arouse the kleptomania dormant in us.

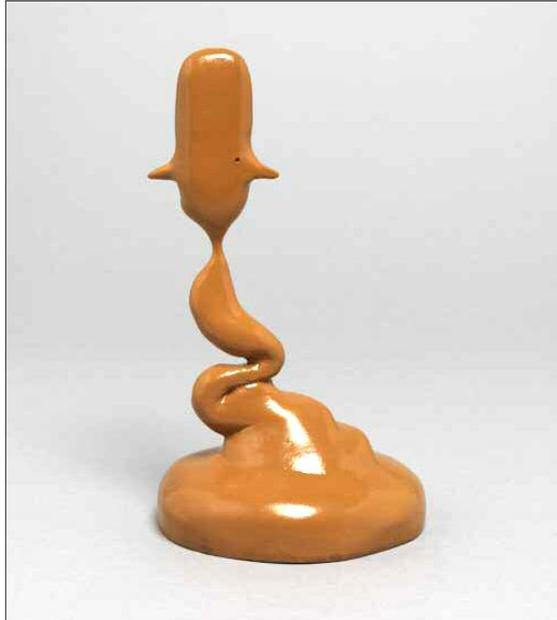
Unlike the "king size," the mini must be seen up close. It presupposes a focus, whence the grip it has on the sphere of desire. At the same time, the *small* creates the void around it, because in order to be seen, it needs more space. It thus takes up more room than its size might have us suppose, whence its capacity to become a *fetish*. Its relationship with the environment (the city for cars, the exhibition venue for art objects, the pocket for *tamagotchis*...) and with us thus becomes political.

After incarnating the *object boom* of the industrialized countries, when the shortening of skirts and compacting of vehicles had taken on the dimension of a social phenomenon, creating the vogue for the word "mini" in the West, the compact object is gauged today by the yardstick of the cute (symptomatic, superfluous, polished object), the disquieting (fetichized, serial, cult object) and the resistant (individualistic, Pear to Pear, critical object). We hate to love it and we love to hate it. We want it in secret and without ever having seen it enough. The contemporary mini has *sex appeal*.

**Exhibition Curator:** Alexis Vaillant, Chief Curator CAPC, museum of contemporary art, Bordeaux



**Jason Meadows**  
*Hamburger Tower*, 2008  
 Painting and spray paint on canvas  
 182 x 61 cm  
 Courtesy Corvi-Mora, London  
 Photo Marcus Leith

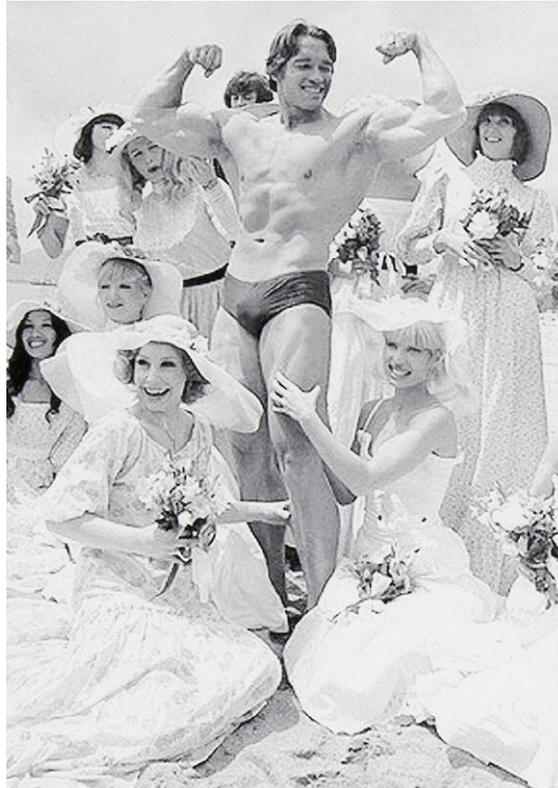


**-My son could have done that.**  
**-Well, he didn't.**

**Paul Johnson**  
*Head*, 2010  
 Paper mache  
 19 x 14 x 12 cm  
 Courtesy Ancient & Modern, London

**Dorota Jurczak**  
*Smierdzace Balasem*, 2007  
 Smelly turd  
 Painted bronze  
 19.5 x 10.5 x 9cm  
 Courtesy Corvi-Mora, London  
 Photo Marcus Leith

**Karl Holmqvist**  
*Untitled (jokepainting)*, 2006  
 Silkscreen on canvas  
 70 x 100 cm  
 Courtesy Galerie Giti Nourbakhsh, Berlin  
 Photo Matthias Kolb

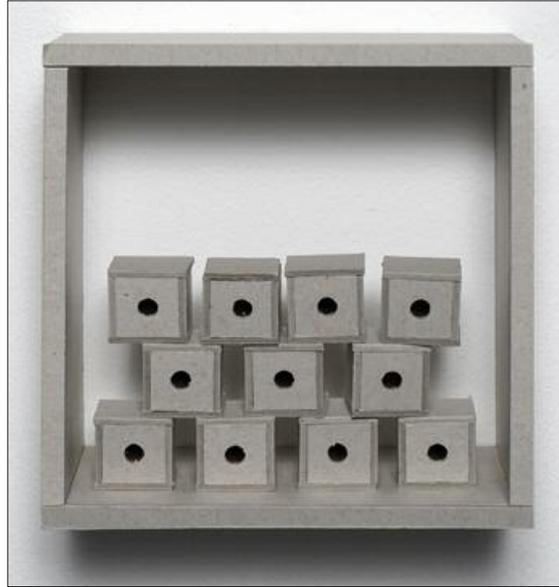
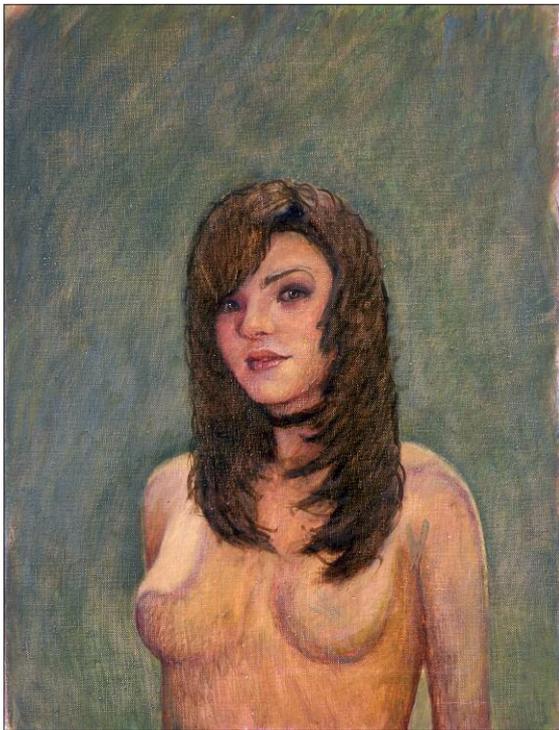


**Gabi Dziuba**  
*Jewels*, 2009  
 Variable dimensions  
 Courtesy Giti Nourbakhsh, Berlin  
 Photo Thomas Gaska

**Anissa Mack**  
*Untitled (Pumpkin)*, 2007  
 Painted bronze and magazines  
 22.8 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm  
 Courtesy Laurel Gitlen / Small A Projects, New York

**Eric Wesley**  
*Lexus*, 2009 (detail)  
 Printed decal on die cast model  
 8 x 30 x 13 cm  
 Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

**Jonathan Horowitz**  
*The Governor*, 2003 (detail)  
 Inkjet prints  
 7 parts each 28.5 x 22.5 x 2.5 cm  
 Collection migros museum für gegenwartskunst Zürich  
 Photos A. Burger, Zürich



**Michael Fullerton**

*Rupert Murdoch's Third Wife (Wendy Deng)*, 2007  
 Oil on linen  
 60 x 45 cm  
 Peter Peri Collection, London  
 Courtesy the artist and Carl Freedman Gallery, London  
 Photo Andy Keate

**Daniel McDonald**

*Forced To Sell Artwork From Personal Collection In Order To Offset Living Expenses / Economic Collapse Limits Resale Opportunities (Gizmo)*, 2008  
 Mixed media  
 31.75 x 8.9 cm  
 Josef della Nogare Collection, Bolzano  
 Courtesy of GaGA, Mexico City  
 Photo Wiley Hoard

**Philip Newcombe**

*Queen Bitch*, 2010  
 Cigarette stub, tape  
 Courtesy the artist, London

**Dean Hughes**

*Boxes*, 2008  
 Backing card  
 16 x 15 x 6 cm  
 Maria Stenfors Collection, London  
 Courtesy the artist, Edinburgh

**Akiko & Masako Takada**

*Shopping Bag*, 2008  
 Package of gum  
 3.4 x 2.3 x 1 cm  
 Courtesy of the artists, Tokyo



**Des Hughes**  
*Angry Pins*, 1999  
 Resin, brass powder, brass wike  
 5 x 0.5 x 0.5 cm  
 Courtesy Ancient & Modern, London

**Michaela Eichwald**  
*Hand Bedeutungsproduzent*, 2010  
 Lentils, thermometer, needles, comb, chalk, chinese noodles,  
 potato sprouts and elastic in resin, metal, lacquer  
 30 x 10 x 12 cm  
 Courtesy Vilma Gold, London

**Glenn Sorensen**  
*A Treat*, 2008  
 Oil on canvas  
 19 x 31 cm  
 Courtesy Corvi-Mora, London  
 Photo Marcus Leith

**Richard Wathen**  
*Llareggub*, 2009  
 Oil on linen on aluminium  
 225 x 180 cm  
 Private collection, London  
 Courtesy Max Wigram, London

**Richard Pettibone**  
*Frank Stella Yagd II*, 1968-69  
 Acrylic on canvas  
 30 x 15 cm  
 Private collection, Paris  
 Photo Aurélien Mole

## Complaining is a very important form of pleasure

Aaron Schuster in conversation with Maša Ogrizek

**M.O.: The main aim of psychiatry is to cure, to restore mental health, “normality”. Today it is mainly done with pills, which has become a big business.**

A.S.: The pharmaceutical industry actively shapes our understanding of mental illness and creates new clinical categories based on what chemicals are discovered. Today the questions of mentally illness, the cure, and pharmaceutical research are all merged into one. Because of the explosion of antidepressant drugs everybody discovered that they are more or less depressed. But I disagree that mental illnesses are simply invented out of nothing. Some hardcore cultural constructionists would say these categories are meaningless and they are created as means of social control and profit making. This is misguided, but it's clear that our understanding of mental illness is greatly influenced by the drugs that are available and marketed to treat it.

**At first it seems that as a society we have become more tolerant of mental illness. But in fact we recognise and accept mental illness only in order to cure it. So in a way while the line between normality and mental illness is becoming more blurred, at the same time it is strengthened.**

I agree. There's a funny coincidence here of two seemingly opposed positions. One is the Freudian idea that everybody is ill, and that madness isn't something you can simply eradicate, but must learn to live with one way or another. And the other is that we have all these new therapies, especially pills, for eliminating our problems. So, indeed, we have become obsessed as a culture with tracking down all sorts of different pathologies – sleep disorders, depression, sexual dysfunction, everything you can think of.

**We just recognise our problems in order to eliminate them...**

Not even eliminate. A “normal” person would be useless as a consumer. The point of these drug therapies is to create an anxiety – I don't sleep eight hours every night, so maybe I should take a pill, when probably five hours would be perfectly O.K. So these campaigns generate an anxiety and a new need, which is what capitalism always does – create new desires.

**... and strengthen norms.**

Of course if you were able to list what these norms are and somebody would be able to achieve them, this would be a pure nightmare – sleeping eight hours a night, always in a good mood, always having an erection ... Terrible!

**As you mentioned Freud himself denied the distinction between health and mental illness.**

Freud's argument that there is a continuity between normality and pathology is really radical, because it undermines the idea that there is some kind of a fixed norm of health. And indeed, from the psychoanalytic perspective, we are all more or less sick, we can all identify with neurosis and even psychosis to a certain extent. On the other hand, the way that culture has

exploited this idea is highly ironic: if we are all ill, that means that we must constantly be in therapy, working on ourselves, getting better. And there are plenty of industries that are happy to minister to our various ticks and mental problems... So culture has perverted the original radical insight into an ideal of perpetual therapy, a problem already present in Freud.

**Now we have the Oprah Winfrey phenomenon, and the whole discourse and culture of self-help.**

Let's take the specific case of depression. It took over from earlier clinical categories like neurosis or hysteria in the 80's. Today everybody is depressed or at least a bit depressed. And there is a serious side to that. It's not simply that it's a purely socially constructed disease, there is, let us say, a real depression. For psychoanalysis, depression is a narcissistic illness, because it means that you are stuck with yourself, obsessed by yourself, but at the same time—and this is the terrible thing—the self is totally empty. Nothing really interests you, you can't engage in any activity, maybe the world still vaguely tempts you but you can't manage to escape this stupid self of yours that has become totally uninteresting and persecutes you with its unending boredom. Now, if you look at pop-culture, all it does is talk about the self incessantly. Everything, from art to life to politics, is reduced to expressions or reflections of the self. And of course we end up creating a totally boring and depressed culture. In the end, the self is really uninteresting. You are only happy in life when you forget yourself. A philosopher in the library is a perfect image of happiness: just lost in his meditations, pouring through a stack of books. But people are constantly thinking about themselves, talking about themselves, and in general wanting to be a self—this is the model of depression.

**In one of your texts you mentioned hypochondria as a form of pleasure. Is this in a way connected with this phenomenon of self-involvement?**

What is interesting in hypochondria is that it is a very serious, painful experience. But there is a specific pleasure in hypochondria, that the person loses himself in complaining about it. The real pleasure of the hypochondriac is explaining to someone in great detail all the little things going on in his body, the different aches and so on. In fact, the other person doesn't even have to say anything, he or she just has to be present. This happens quite frequently, by the way, in totally different contexts. Often you need the presence of someone in order to be able to ‘talk to yourself’, because it is impossible to do this in a direct way. You have to go through the detour of the other, to address another person, but this appeal is a kind of fiction. In such circumstances, the other is definitely not called on to respond; they should basically just shut up.

**I realize this is a totally unromantic thing to say – but this almost sounds like a formula for good relationships. Sometimes you just have to pretend that you are listening...**

Hypocrisy – like pretending to listen – is a very important aspect of our social relationships, without it we wouldn't be able to get along at all. People are always saying that you have to listen to the other, to try to understand the other. I think that the model of good relationships is actually interlinking monologues; I think

that there is no real dialogue in life at all. I mean, it is not that you really listen and truly respond to what the other person says. If you have good luck you and your partner deliver your monologues and they manage to accidentally intersect at certain points. That's magical. **You have to be quite rational to accept this idea, which is not very romantic.**

But it is romantic. Freud had a very nice definition of love – that you have mutually compatible symptoms.

**So what would be the couple of two hypochondriacs be like?**

It would be a marvellous couple. They would talk endlessly about their own illnesses, a perfect couple. Complaining is a very important form of pleasure which has been devalued by Christian culture, especially Protestant culture. They completely misunderstood the necessity of complaining to be happy. Put otherwise, the problem of being happy is that you have nothing to complain about and therefore you are not happy anymore.

**Do you agree that there is a mutual relation between a specific form of mental illness and a broader historical, cultural frame?**

There is always something either too right or too wrong with the human mind, which necessarily leads to malfunctions and breakdowns of all kinds. But the specific forms these pathologies take are always determined in a historical moment by culture. They receive a kind of cultural coloration. There is a madness intrinsic to the species, I mean on a biological level, but this madness is also always symbolically articulated. You could say that mental illness is both natural and artificial.

**Is there a pathology that is specific to our culture?**

There is a kind of socially mandatory depression nowadays, which consists in the imperative to express yourself and especially how you feel. But I don't know how I feel. In fact, nobody knows how they really feel. This is what is repressed in contemporary culture, which has made feelings the very measure of personal authenticity. Concepts are complicated, speech is ambiguous, words can mislead, but the one thing that is absolutely certain are feelings. That's the big lie today. Feelings are totally amorphous and deceptive; we don't really know what they are, but we talk about them a lot, so they must exist, right?

**In your lecture you mentioned that you don't agree with Deleuze who makes a connection between capitalism and patriarchy. You claimed that the opposite is true: capitalism itself had undermined patriarchy.**

There used to be this idea that capitalism needs a stable family form in order to reproduce itself, that it ends up reaffirming strict divisions between mother, father, and child. Now this is not true. Capitalism is incredibly perverse and is happy to break apart the family like any other social structure in order to create new consumers. Capitalism reinforces de-oedipalization. What do we have today? Supposedly the strong father figure has disappeared and now we have to negotiate everything. We have shifted from a society based on authority to one based on constant negotiation. This undoubtedly constitutes a kind of progress, but it also creates new problems and anxieties. The open, liberal, tolerant institution is another kind of monster.

**That explains the kind of nostalgia for “good old totalitarianism”?**

Yes. Even Obama is a good example of that. He has this very liberal attitude of negotiation, of listening to other people's voices, of including as many people as possible in the coalition, we even have to listen to stupid Republicans... And really what the left was

dreaming about was a left fascist, someone who would just make decrees and fix Bush's mess. So there is this nostalgia for a real authority figure.

**You chose pleasure as a topic for your PhD dissertation, which was entitled *The Trouble With Pleasure: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*. Why?**

I was very interested in – and I didn't think that had been done before – a real philosophical analysis of the concept of pleasure and the history of it. I started at the end, as it were, by rereading Freud. When Freud speaks about *Lust* he actually has multiple definitions of it, which change throughout his career and even contradict one other. I set about untangling the different ideas of pleasure in Freud's work, and I came to see his theory as recapitulating, implicitly, many of the different concepts of pleasure and debates about it in the history of philosophy. I eventually went back to Plato and Aristotle and made my way through the tradition.

**And you enjoyed this work?**

Tremendously. Too much, in fact. It took me many years to finish my PhD and, of course, I was very sad when it was done, since the pleasure came to an end.

**In everyday life the term pleasure is usually associated with hedonism as opposed to asceticism. All advertisements are based on the command: Enjoy!**

We have to be careful. Advertising isn't about enjoyment, it's about *images* of enjoyment, which is something else. Advertising is perverse in a very precise sense: namely, that the idea of enjoyment becomes more important than enjoyment itself and in a way becomes another source of pleasure – contemplating enjoyment. That is a very interesting thing about human desire – we prefer to consume images of pleasure than actually experience it, and that is the basis of advertising, its 'higher' form of pleasure.

**This makes me think of a joke about a guy who slept with a beautiful woman on a desert island and was very unhappy, because he had nobody he could brag to. The real pleasure is talking about the sex afterwards, not doing it.**

When people talk about pleasure, in philosophy too, of course everyone is for it: who doesn't like pleasure?! It's sexy. But the truth of the matter is that while people like the idea of pleasure, pleasure itself is much less attractive.

**Why is that?**

Because pleasure means self-loss, loss of self-control. You don't know where it's going to go, you're not directing things anymore. And it's precisely this disappearance of the self that can create anxiety. This anxiety lies at the core of perversion. Typically, people associate perversion with dirtiness, excitement, breaking taboos, etc. But in a more technical sense, perverts are actually exceptionally immaculate and theoretically-minded people. The basic pervert fantasy is to watch yourself enjoying, that is, to be present as a subject at the very moment when you should 'let yourself go', disappear into the flow of activity. What a pervert cannot stand is the impersonal aspect of enjoyment, the temporary loss of self in the play of anonymous drives and organs that defines 'normal' sexual pleasure. They want to direct things, to be in control, even their own submission is something they arrange and direct.

**You named the present form of pleasure “antiseptic hedonism”.**

There is a socially acceptable form of hedonism, a kind of “healthy” hedonism. Everyone still talks about May '68, this moment of breaking taboos, free love, sexual revolution, political radicalism; it is considered a high point of liberation – *jouissez sans entraves!* – that was later repressed or normalized. But the period that in

my opinion really embodies pleasure for us is not the late but the *early* sixties. This was the time when taboos were still in force and people knew how to keep secrets – before confessionalized culture. Constant smoking and drinking and sexual harassment... mixed together with a vague consciousness that it was all about to radically change, that the world was coming to an end. There is a kind of a reverse Biblical movement from the sixties to today. Instead of falling from the Garden of Eden into sin, we were in sin and now we have fallen into the Garden of Eden and we are not so happy about it.

**The belief is still alive that the political “right” is conservative, it represses pleasure, and “the left” is more liberated, it enjoys.**

It's a strong cliché that the political right represses pleasure, especially bodily pleasure, and the left stands for its liberation. Of course there's a point to this. Repression is responsible for all the well known sexual scandals that plague the Church or the Republican party in the US; pedophile priests and homophobic politicians frequenting male prostitutes are not mere accidents, but structural symptoms. However, I think it's important to emphasize, against a certain sixties radicalism, that pleasure is not per se politically progressive. There is nothing intrinsically leftist about pleasure. Indeed, if you look around the opposite is more true. If anybody today is on the side of pleasure it's definitely the far right. They are fulfilling their desires, having loads of populist fun. The left is largely paralyzed in the face of this reactionary enjoyment.

**Have the cultural forms of pleasure, in your opinion, significantly changed throughout history?**

Lacan famously complained that psychoanalysis never managed to invent a new perversion. Related to this, there is an interesting essay by Aldous Huxley from the 1930s titled *Wanted: A New Pleasure*. His argument is that pleasure hasn't changed at all since Roman or Greek times, or even earlier. Across history, we have always experienced exactly the same pleasure, the only thing that's changed is its culture shapes or forms; television instead of coliseum games, for example. Huxley speculates that the only real possibility for a pleasure revolution would be the invention of a wonder drug with no side effects: ecstasy without the crash. I think that what's happening today in the neurosciences would really fascinate Huxley, the possibility of directly inducing pleasure through neuro-electrical stimulation. Instead of the same pleasure being articulated in different cultural shapes, here we confront the possibility of pleasure without any culture shape whatsoever. Just mindless ecstasy, pure brain pleasure.

**Is there an asymmetry between the way man and woman enjoy?**

Men are convinced that men and women enjoy in completely different ways and women are not interested in the question at all.

**Maybe the reason is that the men are scared that their pleasure is smaller – remember the myth of Tiresias who said that if sexual pleasure were divided into ten parts, one is for the man, and nine for the woman.**

Man is concerned with pleasure in a very phallic way: about the size, is it bigger or smaller, who enjoys more, can I control its appearance, am I the cause, etc. These are typical male obsessions. Women think it's stupid and are mostly laughing at us about it.

**And what would be in your opinion the highest form of pleasure?**

Philosophy is the best pleasure. Sitting in the library reading all the time is the ultimate dream.

**Is this your subjective preference or do you mean that it is true in general?**

The sad thing is that today, in modern times, I would have to say it's subjective, but in Greek times it was absolutely objective. Philosophical pleasure was the highest pleasure, and it was not a personal preference, it was inscribed in Being itself, the very structure of the cosmos. The best philosophical theology ever invented was Aristotle's. God is thinking all the time and enjoys tremendously and all the other beings in the universe are so impressed with this that they just circle around him. It's completely surreal! This is my favourite theology.

**Isn't it a bit autistic?**

Yes it is. But is. But pleasure is autistic. It's not that you can't share pleasure; indeed many pleasures are very social and involve other people. But there is always a crucial moment when pleasure completely disconnects you from yourself, from the other, from the world, from everything.

(First published in Slovenian in *Dnevnik*, 26 June 2010, pp. 10-12)

## Events

### **A tiny incision in reality.**

by Corinne Atlan, Haïku master and translator from the Japanese

December 1, 2010, 7 p.m.

Ground-floor, inside the *BigMinis* exhibition

### **Are the minis swashbuckler objects?**

by Claire Moulène, art critic at *Inrocks*

January 19, 2011, 7 p.m.

CAPC conference hall

### **The Music of Regret, 2006.**

Screening of Laurie Simmons' cult movie

February 2, 2011, 7 p.m.

Featuring Meryl Streep, Adam Guettel, Tony Nation

& the nervous puppets

Courtesy Salon 94, New York

CAPC conference hall

## Publication

### **BigMinisBook**

10.5 x 7 cm

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French / English

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With contributions by Bruce Hainley, Jennifer Higgie,

Claire Moulène, David Musgrave, Aaron Schuster,

Alexis Vaillant

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## Also on view

### **CAPC, ou la vie saisie par l'art**

Until November 21, 2010

### **Robert Breer, The Floats**

November 19, 2010/February 27, 2011

### **Jean-Paul Thibaud : Méta-archives 1**

*Anarchives fragmentaires et énigmatiques*

Until April 3, 2011

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## Access by tram

B line, CAPC stop

C line, Jardin Public stop

## Schedules

11:00 – 18:00 / 20:00, Wednesdays

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20 minutes

Mouvement

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iConcept

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Wit FM

front page

David Musgrave

*Animal*, 1998

Mixed media

22 x 14 x 3 cm

Courtesy greengrassi, London. Photo : Marcus Leith

