

# of monsters, aliens



Margarita Gluzberg  
in conversation  
with Clare Manchester



# and wigs



**Clare Manchester** The technique that you use seems integral to the images you make. Pencil, line and lack of colour somehow in themselves seem suggestive of hairiness.

**Margarita Gluzberg** Yes, with the initial wigs series I came up with the idea of a line for each hair, which works simply as a formal device. I made an almost arbitrary choice with the wigs. But I suppose that the strange and intriguing thing about wigs is that they're intrinsically artificial, they pretend they're something else, posing as organic objects when in fact they're not. They're fundamentally theatrical.

**CM** Putting on a wig can be to do with adopting an incongruous hairstyle or a

transient identity. Does this have anything to do with what wigs signify for you?

**MG** They're confusing objects generally which I quite like because they are linked to people's notions of deviancy – transvestites, prostitutes.

**CM** They hide reality. The wigs are images on their own without a face or head, in a sense the image is very alienating because there's nothing there besides emptiness.

**MG** Yes, but then cancer victims sometimes wear wigs, so they also suggest a sense of being outside society while at the same time trying to conform to it. By wearing a wig you are both conforming and becoming somebody else.

I like the fact that they're confusing objects because I don't want identity to be the only thing that comes out of my work. In fact, when I began the *Wigs* series, I homed in on their confusing qualities, interested in the way that they never seem to signify one thing or another. Whenever I picked a wig up in Brick Lane or in a second-hand shop, I was seized by revulsion. You can't ever quite get away from that feeling of dead animals that they have about them. I've definitely got an obsession with hair and also for that matter with missing heads and missing faces. It must be a horror film thing!?

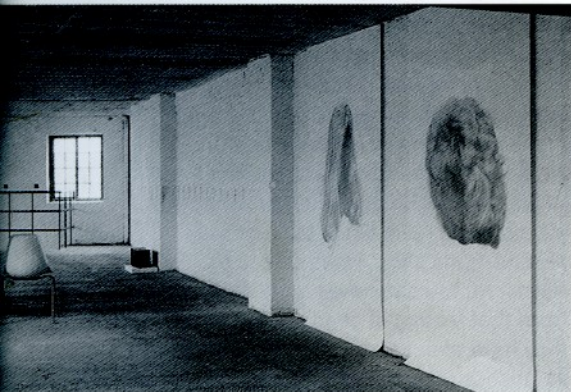
**CM** Yes, the monster drawing looks a bit like the beast in *La Belle et la Bête*. How do monsters and horror films feed into your work?

**MG** The more I drew wigs, the more monstrous they became. Ultimately, they were transformed from representations of wigs, from what wigs are, into something quite different. I began to treat them more abstractly, aligning the drawing process with this notion of growing something. I also started thinking about Frankenstein's monster, and specimens in a jar. It's only a small thing, but it interested me that if you change even the proportions of one thing within a drawing, that it could potentially become a depiction of something else. It's like a kind of scientific experiment where the wigs turn into horrible mutated animals. For me the wig becomes like a starting point for fiction, a lead back to the source of mysterious creatures that otherwise seem to appear from nowhere. I am interested in the horror film and the B movie, especially when the monster figure is represented as something curiously flawed or impotent; the dysfunctional almost pathetic monster. Monsters in these movies are also not very well made. I'm interested in the relationship between horror and impotence. I want to talk about a failure to frighten.

**CM** Films are often more frightening when you never quite see the thing that you are afraid of.

**MG** Yes, never seeing the monster. Once your fears are made visual they aren't that scary anymore. So, really I'm making images that I know aren't that scary. But unlike the way these monsters are made, my drawings aren't badly made, they're actually very intricate. I even sometimes worry about making something that's too aesthetic.





**CM** So you want to make drawings that aren't just beautiful.

**MG** Yes. I'm quite into the fact that they are beautiful and beautifully drawn, but I also want to disrupt that.

**CM** Before your series of wigs you were drawing holes?

**MG** Holes yes, the vortex. With these drawings I was obviously more engaged with notions of abstraction. Interested that is, almost in terms of science. In relation to the idea of Frankenstein's monster, that you combine things and grow something out of nothing, I was interested quite simply in the idea of having only lines and a pencil. I could make a wig, but if I don't, if I change the structure, the DNA, all I end up with is a hole. *Hole* is an ambiguous image. It doubles as a pebble and as a hole or a sphere. But I call it *Hole* because spoken it is indistinguishable from 'whole'. I like these really simple things. *Hole* came from the idea that you can start with a line and end up with something indecipherable. Lines can be encouraged to grow.

**CM** There seems to be a tension between fact, or an idea of 'the real', and fiction running through your work. Are the images you are making more related to the world of science or the territory within which a monster might be grown?

**MG** I think it's more to do with the latter. I'm interested in science, and the way that scientific developments influence the way we see the world and also in the fact that my drawings are very much made up of parts, they're woven out of lines. I almost see them as sculptures made out of lines.

**CM** Perhaps we could talk a little about the scale and time factors in your work. The scale must make the drawings very

time consuming. How long does each one take to complete?

**MG** It really depends. I tend to get a drawing to a point where it's nearly finished and then I linger over it. I'd say to feel happy with it probably takes a couple of months, but it sits half finished for ages, I have to look at it and reassess it for a long time. Every mark is a piece of time. The lines are marks of time because they're not instant. The time factor is visible in the work. And of course, as mentioned earlier, every line is a hair, the scale in relation to this is really important, the drawings have to make sense. A problem generally with drawing is that there's a lot of drawing that doesn't need to be drawing. I'm interested in work that can only be what it is and couldn't be made in any other medium. I want the drawings to be really sensational in terms of scale, in the same way that when you see a replica of a dinosaur or something you go wow! I want to get that 'Oh my god, it's so big, and it's a spider' reaction.

**CM** That may happen with the spider images but wigs are not quite so horrible.

**MG** Well no, there isn't the same direct

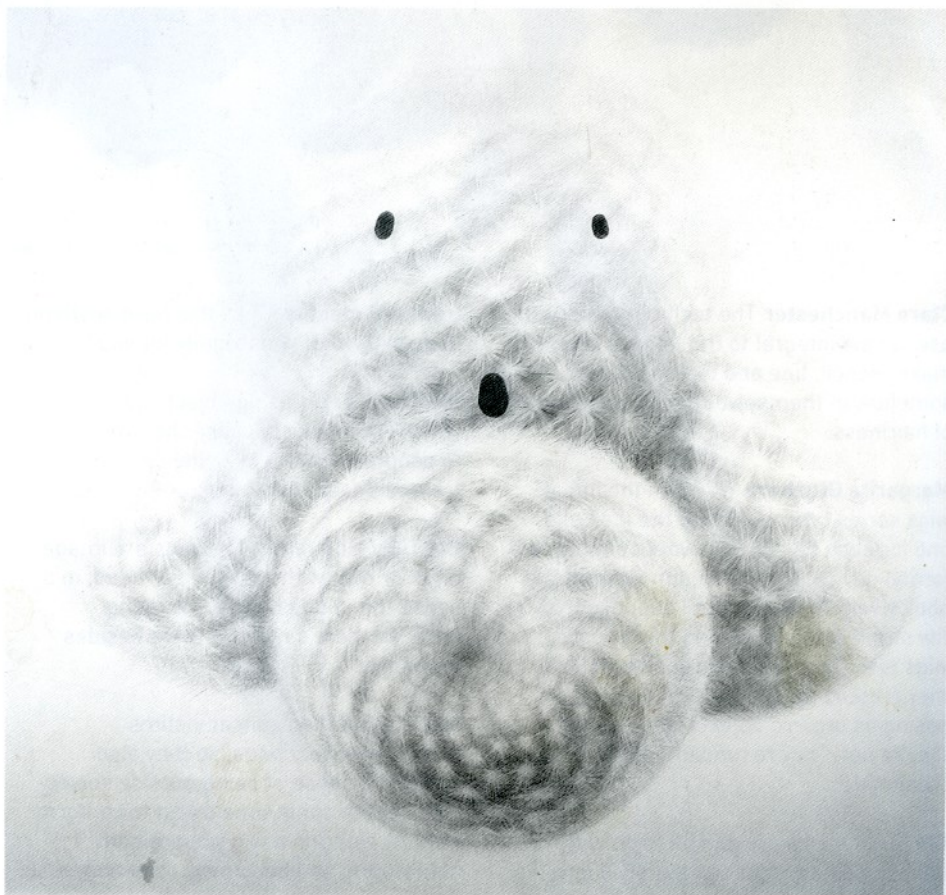
link available to both a giant wig and a giant spider.

**CM** Is that why you chose spiders, not because they were hairy, but because of the horror factor?

**MG** By the time I'd finished with the wig series they were really monstrous. The spider is the absolute symbol of the monstrous from the very start. The most direct, most classic scenario for a horror film is that something small gets bigger. I don't think that my spider images are actually frightening. If anything there's a kind of pathos in them and that's what fascinates me. That takes us back to Frankenstein again; the monster who is a failure, the invisible man. Or returning to the Hollywood B movie tradition there's always something that mutates, an experiment that goes wrong, as in *The Fly*. The audience response hovers between fear and pity.

**CM** Do they surprise you sometimes, the way the images turn out?

**MG** Yes they do completely, and that's really important. I want to be completely shocked by what I've done.







**CM** You drew your wigs from a wig catalogue. How did you choose which wigs to draw? I notice you have avoided the spiky punk one.

**MG** I just seem to know which ones are right, it's a kind of arbitrary visual choice. I'd try one and it would just be wrong. Maybe it has something to do with the way it lies. I think all the ones I chose aren't a definite style. I didn't want people to go 'Oh that's an Eighties bob', or 'Oh that's a really sixties beehive', or something, because that becomes something that's much more about fashion, running too near to issues of identity. Even though

generically, obviously, wigs are all about identity. I wanted the wigs to be quite ambiguous. So you'd actually wonder what that person was like.

**CM** Were they all women's wigs?

**MG** Yes, they were.

**CM** Was that deliberate?

**MG** I ended up wanting them to be women's wigs just because that's my thing.

**CM** That's who you are?

**MG** Yes. Although I'm thinking of doing some beards now.

**Margarita Gluzberg** will be showing at the Richard Salmon Gallery, London W8 in early 1999.

**Clare Manchester** is an editor at Phaidon Press.