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DAZED

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TEXT JESSICA HERON-LANGTON

ARTIST MARIANNA SIMNETT EXPLAINS HER UNCOMFORTABLE NEW FILM FOR CHANNEL 4'S RANDOM ACTS

[Marianna Simnett](#)'s *The Needle & The Larynx* premiered on Channel 4 on Friday, as part of their Random Acts. Following a girl, played by Marianna, who gets her voice lowered by a surgeon, this short clip was inspired by Marianna's "terrifying urge to transform into something other," she explains.

The four-minute and 17-second long clip is filmed as one continuous long shot in excruciating slow motion. The audience sees Marianna sitting in the surgeon's chair as she gets injected with botox, a procedure usually reserved for men whose voices stay high after puberty. Narrated by the surgeon and Marianna, the conversations and the accompanying music, written by Marianna and [Lucinda Chua](#), reflect the intensity of the procedure which is taking place, with the music getting louder and the voices becoming more and more distorted as the surgery goes on.

Although we hear the surgery finish, and then hear Marianna speaking about the procedure '48 hours later', we still watch Marianna getting the surgery. The uncomfortableness of this is intentional: "I'm not interested in making work that pleases people, or to make people feel comfortable," Marianna says. "I think comfort is a very dangerous thing that should be avoided."

Can you explain *The Needle & The Larynx* and the process of making it?

Marianna Simnett: The *Needle & The Larynx* is about a girl (me) who gets her voice lowered by a surgeon. To make the film I underwent a procedure usually reserved for men whose voices stay high after puberty, a rare condition called puberphonia AKA mutational falsetto. You see me under the hands of a surgeon, his needle penetrating my neck as he injects a dose of Botox into my larynx, which paralyses my muscle and effectively lowers my voice. Original music was written by myself and Lucinda Chua. I wanted it to echo the woozy, hypnotic texture of the film, like a toxic substance worming into your body.

What was the inspiration behind this piece?

Marianna Simnett: A terrifying urge to transform into something other, a fascination with toxins, a wish to upset thresholds and power structures. The skin protecting my larynx acts as an interface through which internal and external forces are played out.

What do beauty and identity mean to you, and how does this relationship influence the art you make?

Marianna Simnett: Real beauty turns you inside out and overtakes your mind. Beauty doesn't have a standard or an ideal, it exists outside of that. It confronts fears and toys with desires.

The procedure that took place in this video is one which masculinises a voice, how does this comment on identity? And do you think this comments on trans identity?

Marianna Simnett: A woman's voice lies between 165 to 255Hz, a man's lies between 80 to 180Hz. Before the procedure, mine measured at 194Hz. After the procedure, I was hoarse and weak. It was very difficult to speak, and the results were far from what I expected. The surgeon in the film is leading in voice surgery for gender reassignment. I am melting the borders of what it means to be female. *The Needle & The Larynx* is a story about transgression and a celebration of overthrowing the borders of normal.

Why do you manipulate the body in your work?

Marianna Simnett: I believe in the power of transformation, and letting go of a self-important 'I'. This means constantly being prepared for things to change but learning how not to get stuck with the tide. I manipulate bodies, animate internal organs, play different characters and roles. My work allows me to be whoever I want to be.

How does this work relate to femininity and our perceptions of gender in society?

Marianna Simnett: In the film, I am portrayed as blonde, blue-eyed, wearing a white dress and black lashes. Girl with a capital G. It follows a tradition of female stereotypes displayed on screen for erotic impact which also sustains patriarchy. There is something horrifying about seeing a girl's neck being probed with a needle held by a latex-covered hand.

What is it about the body that fascinates you so much?

Marianna Simnett: The body is this huge thing we have to carry around but never fully get used to. I think it's a false predicament that we have these flesh sacks called bodies. My sense of self is in a space-time way bigger than just my person... but our bodies fool us into thinking we have closed borders. I'm into showing a world that's more fluid.

Putting your body through pain plays an integral part of the work you produce, what is the relationship between the body, pain and art?

Marianna Simnett: I think pain is inevitable when you are trying to access the underbelly. I make work about things I find disquieting, and pain is just sometimes a necessary part of discovering what's behind the curtain. I don't think of it as a rule. I just follow whatever is needed in the moment, with a very uncompromising attitude. Art is a space for me to play out my horrors in an imaginary environment.

What were you hoping to say/achieve with this piece?

Marianna Simnett: I wanted to live in a state of permanent transition and to dis-identify with myself. And to get under people's skin and paralyse them, like the Botox swimming in my brain.

What are you working on next?

Marianna Simnett: I am currently writing the script for a feature-length film, as well as a short film about sleep. I have just opened solo shows at the New Museum, New York and MMK, Frankfurt and I am participating in the 6th Athens Biennale. Coming up, I have screenings in Turin, Barcelona, a solo show at Frans Hals Museum, Amsterdam, a group show at Sadie Coles, London and a new Radio 3 commission. I'm buying an alto flute as I'd like to develop my music outside of its existence in the films.