

## Portfolio: Rebecca Ackroyd

From Duchamp to Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, the London-based artist selects the images that have stuck with her

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Joe Johnston, *Honey I Shrunk the Kids*, 1989. Courtesy: Walt Disney Pictures

*Honey I Shrunk the Kids* (1989), directed by Joe Johnston

There's something fascinating about the idea of being shrunk down and engulfed by the world around you. It's such a simple idea, to shift scale and completely alter your position and turn a space into something utterly unknown. In the film the garden becomes a jungle. Or when viewing the world from space, an astronaut's whole sense of self changes because the whole world is now in view and they are looking at the place where the whole history of humankind has taken place and it could be squished between a thumb and forefinger. It reminds me of J.G. Ballard's short story *The Enormous Space* (1989) where the corridors of a suburban semi-detached house become giant echoing chambers in the mind of the protagonist.



Two dancers from Pina Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal performing in Paris. Photograph: Bertrand Guay/AFP/Getty Images

Pina Bausch, *Ahnen* (1987)

I went to a performance of the Pina Bausch piece *Ahnen* without knowing a huge amount about her beforehand, and was struck by a correlation between the performance and the process of making an artwork: the rawness of the materials, movements that glide between everyday gesture and something more violent; slapstick comedy playing out through repeated familiar actions, revealing their absurdity; hysterical laughter sinking into abject cries. Her work speaks of the world in the material and emotional sense.



Philip Guston, *Painter's Form II*, 1978, oil on canvas, 1.9 x 2.7 m. Courtesy: © Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas

Philip Guston, *Painters Forms II* (1978)

This painting always sticks in my mind. An almost surgical, cannibal or cyclical cluster of limbs that roams like an insect. There's an honesty in Guston's paintings, especially the figurative works, that's so raw and human and doesn't hide from the embarrassment and shame in expressing it.



Leigh Bowery  
wearing Gareth  
Pugh. Photograph:  
Fergus Greer

### Leigh Bowery

I could have picked so many images of Leigh Bowery. Outwardly his life embodied a performative obsession that pushed boundaries of acceptability. His ever-changing silhouette radically questioned physical form by extending parts or filling in gaps, bulging bits out, lengthening and distorting himself into a living sculptural fortress.



### Lynda Benglis, Paul Cooper Gallery advertisement in *Artforum*, November 1974

There's an unrelenting strength in this image that perhaps lies in its discomfort. It's both a feminist icon and embodiment of sexuality, taking control of being viewed whilst confronting the viewer. The huge phallus seems to accentuate the void or anatomical absence.

Lynda Benglis, Paula Cooper Gallery advertisement in *Artforum*, November 1974. Courtesy: Cheim & Reid, New York © Lynda Benglis, DACS, London/VAGA, New York 2016



Marcel Duchamp,  
*Étant Donnés*,  
1946-66.  
Courtesy: ©  
Succession Marcel  
Duchamp/ADAGP,  
Paris and DACS,  
London 2016

### Marcel Duchamp, *Étant Donnés* (1946-66)

The voyeuristic peek into an unknown world, to look at something and not know what you're seeing or how it goes together or makes sense and not even have to make sense of it. I watched an interview with Leonora Carrington recently and she emphatically states that you shouldn't try to intellectualize art, to unravel it and take away all the mystery. This piece by Duchamp embodies that idea to me.



Karol Szymanowski, *Król Roger*, Royal Opera House, London. Courtesy: © Bill Cooper / Royal Opera House / ArenaPAL

**Karol Szymanowski, *Król Roger*, Royal Opera House, London**

In this production of Szymanowski's *Król Roger* last year, the giant head becomes the architecture in which the opera's moral conflicts are played out. Filling the stage like a God or the enormity of the human psyche it revolved to reveal an inner structure of staircases. It wasn't really the literal symbolism that compelled me to this as an image, but the directness of something that scale in relation to an audience or the actors that felt overwhelming.



*The Witches*, 1990, directed by Nicolas Roeg. Courtesy: Warner Bros

**Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (1990), directed by Nicolas Roeg**

This scene in Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (1990) has glued itself in my mind since I first saw it as a child. The absolute horror that's both compelling and shocking as the Grand High Witch peels back her human face to reveal the monster beneath, the masked truth behind the facade.