

**How do objects express  
concepts about the  
human condition?**

# Felt, meat bones and piles of discarded clothes can all speak of the body



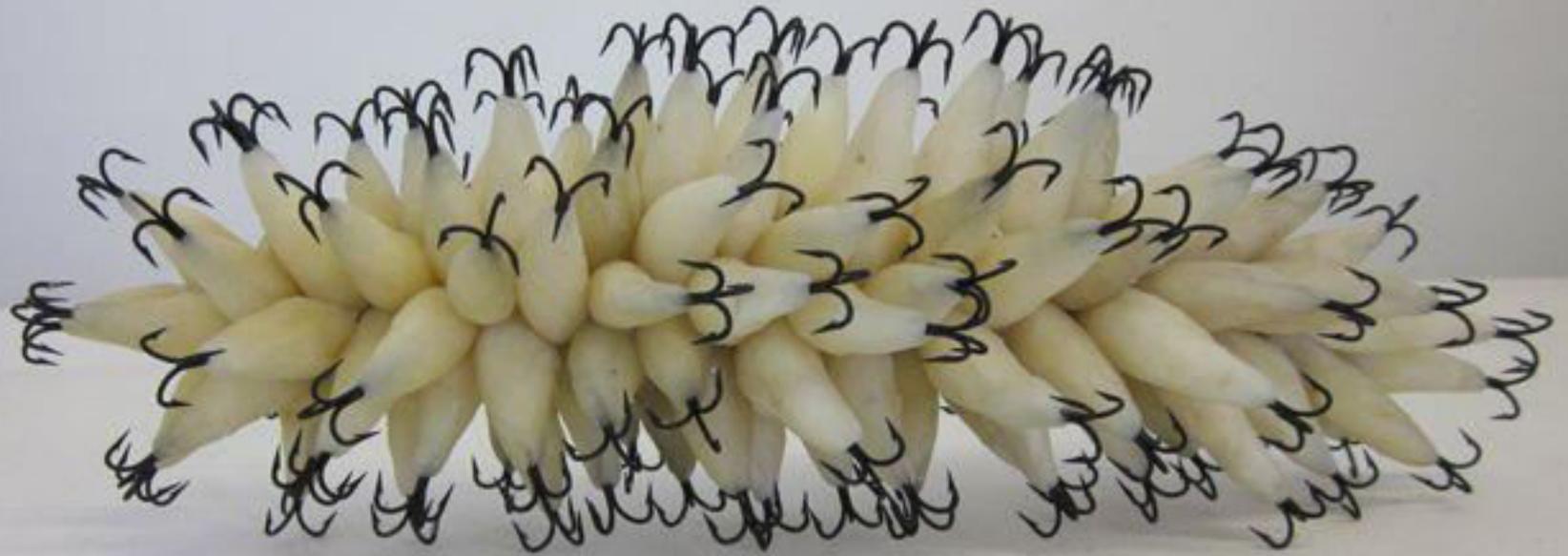
Beuys, J. (1970) Felt Suit in the Tate Collection, [www.tate.org.co.uk](http://www.tate.org.co.uk)



Bourgeois, L (1997) Pink Days and Blue days in LB Louise Bourgeois (2010) Tate Publishing



Boltanski, C (2010) No Man's Land in [magazine.saatchionline.com](http://magazine.saatchionline.com)



## Looking at the work of Susie MacMurray

Attachment  
wax, fish hooks, **wax pieces** 2011



## Aims

1. How MacMurray uses **objects to** represent the body, bodily, **human condition**?
2. How she tips the familiar into the unfamiliar?
2. What, why and how is she suggesting, signifying and substituting?
3. Why we accept this idea?

### **Silver Shell multiple**

silver-plated mussel shell lined with silk velvet  
boxed signed and numbered, from an edition of 250



## Methodology

### 1. Primary research

3 exhibitions, met the artist and watched her being interviewed for a film about women artists. Took notes during the interview and about the artworks.

### 2. Secondary research

Artists website, essays written by gallery curators, newspapers and magazine exhibition reviews, radio and TV interviews  
e.g. BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour.  
Interviews on You Tube.



**Widow 2009**

black nappa leather,  
43 kg adamantine  
dressmakers pins, tailors  
dummy.  
Collection of Manchester  
Art Gallery



‘I am often attracted to ‘stuff’ that generates  
a measure of ambivalence’



**Gladrags 2002**

10,000 fuschia pink balloons,  
rug underlay.

Collection of Pallant House Gallery,  
Chichester.



‘An engagement with materials is central to MacMurray’s practice. Her role is one of alchemist, combining material, form and context’

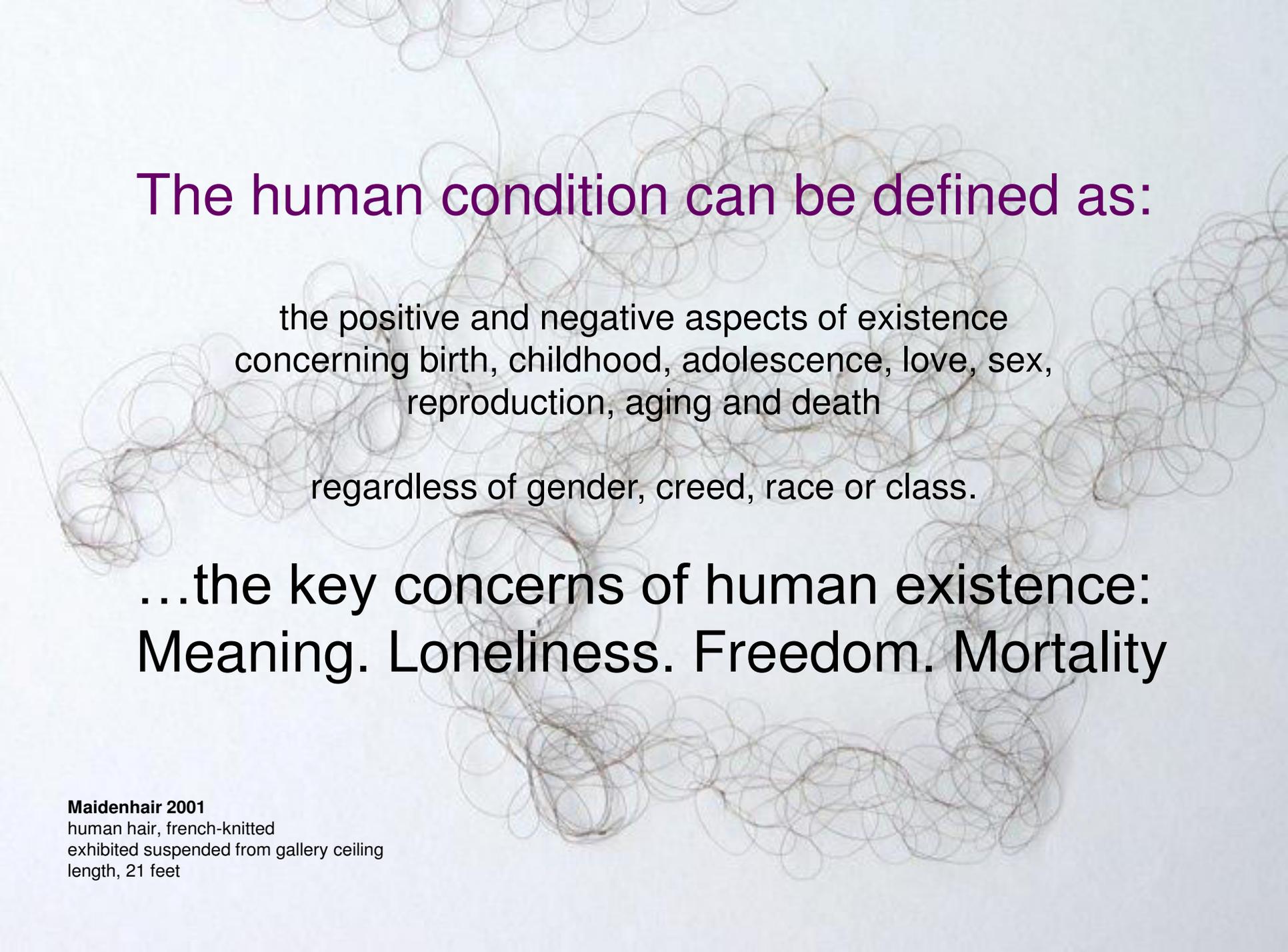


**A Mixture of Frailties 2004**

1400 household gloves turned inside out, calico, tailors dummy



‘My choice of materials is a search for ways to explore the contradictions and paradoxes of human existence’



# The human condition can be defined as:

the positive and negative aspects of existence  
concerning birth, childhood, adolescence, love, sex,  
reproduction, aging and death

regardless of gender, creed, race or class.

...the key concerns of human existence:  
Meaning. Loneliness. Freedom. Mortality

## **Maidenhair 2001**

human hair, french-knitted  
exhibited suspended from gallery ceiling  
length, 21 feet



An object can be defined in:

1. Theory:  
Objecthood/Substance or Bundle theory.  
Defined as consisting of separate **individual components** or it can be considered as one entity.



2. figurative language:  
Synecdoche = **a part of an object can signify its whole.**

Metonymy = an object can **suggest something to which it is associated.**



3. the dictionary:  
as a **tangible thing that can be seen, felt or perceived.** It is the root of the word 'objectifies' to materialize, become real.



How women exercise their empowerment.

1. The separate **individual components** are clearly recognizable wine glasses. Together they can be considered as **one entity**.
2. The lipstick smeared wine glasses signify **women's bodies** and **are associated with** feminine power and freedom.
3. The outcome makes **real a sense** of freedom/entrapment, success/disaster, independence/dependence.
4. The objects and materials tip from the familiar to unfamiliar until you are not sure what you are looking at.

**Here Come the Girls 2009**

Manchester Art Gallery atrium, 1100 wine glasses, lipstick