LOUISE RICHARDS IS CURRENTLY STUDYING A PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON AND IS A RECENT GRADUATE FROM CENTRAL SAINT MARTINS WITH AN MA IN FINE ART (2021), SHE BRINGS A RICH BACKGROUND IN SILVERSMITH ING, JEWELLERY DESIGN, AND ENAMELLING INTO HER ARTISTIC JOURNEY.

RICHARDS' ARTISTIC FOCUS HAS UNDERGONE AN EVOLUTION, PARTICULARLY INFLUENCED BY THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. THIS PERIOD PROMPTED A DEEPER EXPLORATION OF THE PROCESSES, SPACES, AND TOOLS INHERENT WITHIN THE HOME AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE EVERYDAY. IT WAS AMIDST MOMENTS OF MONOTONY AND REPETITION THAT SHE FOUND INSPIRATION, VIEWING HER DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT WITH RENEWED PERSPECTIVE, AND TRANSFORMING MUNDANE HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES INTO INTEGRAL COMPONENTS OF HER CREATIVE PROCESS.

HER PRACTICE MOVES FLUIDLY ACROSS MATERIALS AND PROCESSES, FROM PRINTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND PAINTINGS TO DIGITAL IMAGES, ANIMATIONS, AND VIDEO. SHE'S INTERESTED IN HOW IDEAS SHIFT AS THEY PASS THROUGH DIFFERENT MEDIA, AND HOW EACH MATERIAL BRINGS ITS OWN KIND OF TRUTH.

SHE THINKS OF HER ART PRACTICE AS A LONG-TERM PROCESS: NOT SOMETHING TO FINISH QUICKLY, BUT A CONTINUOUS JOURNEY THAT SHE WANTS TO SUSTAIN FOR LIFE. COMING TO ART LATER HAS GIVEN RICHARDS A DIFFERENT KIND OF PATIENCE AND PERSPECTIVE.

BEFORE MAKING ART FULLTIME, SHE WORKED IN RESTAURANTS AND AS A JEWELLER. THOSE EXPERIENCES TAUGHT HER TO VALUE TOUCH, REPETITION, AND RHYTHM, THE QUIET SKILLS OF MAKING THAT NOW INFORM HER VISUAL LANGUAGE.

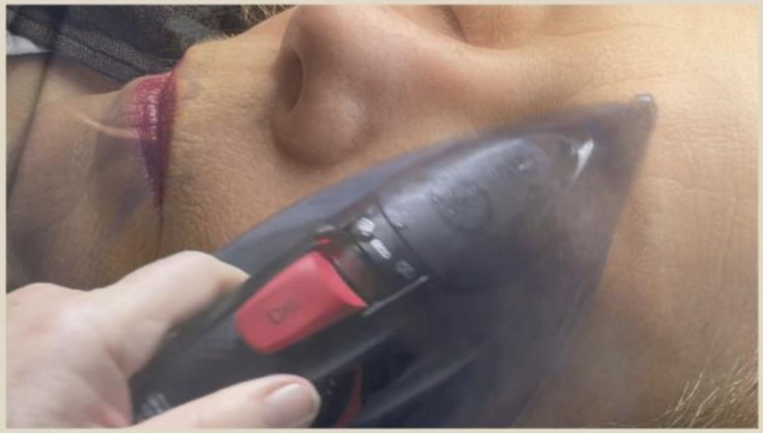
SHE IS DRAWN TO COLOUR, TEXTURE, AND SURFACE, AND OFTEN USES LAYERING AND MATERIAL PLAY TO EXPLORE TRANSFORMATION, CARE, AND IMPERFECTION.

CENTRAL TO HER PRACTICE IS AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF THE MATERIALITY AND FUNCTIONALITY IMBUED WITHIN THE TOOLS OF HER KITCHEN, WHICH HAVE ORGANICALLY SHAPED THEMSELVES TO THE CONTOURS OF HER HANDS OVER TIME.

UTILISING A DIVERSE ARRAY OF MEDIUMS INCLUDING MARK MAKING, PRINTING, DRAWING, PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO, AND ANIMATION, RICHARDS ENDEAVOURS TO PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF TRADITIONAL MATERIALS AND PROCESSES IN ART CREATION. THROUGH THIS EXPLORATION, SHE AIMS TO CHALLENGE CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS SURROUNDING THE ART VERSUS CRAFT DISCOURSE, BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN THE TWO REALMS.

'IRONING FACE WITH STEAM'

STILL FROM 'IRONING'



STILL FROM 'IRONING'

1. IRONING STAGES A FAMILIAR DOMESTIC GESTURE AGAINST YOUR OWN FACE. WHEN DID THIS ACTION SHIFT, FOR YOU, FROM ABSURD TO NECESSARY?

THE WORK RESPONDS TO THE EVER-INCREASING PRESSURE TO PRESENT ONESELF AS PERFECT AND AGELESS. IRONING ONE'S OWN FACE IS ABSURD, IF ONLY IT WERE THAT SIMPLE TO SMOOTH AWAY WRINKLES. YET PEOPLE ROUTINELY SUBJECT THEMSELVES TO COSMETIC PROCEDURES THAT CAN BE EQUALLY VIOLENT AND POTENTIALLY DEVASTATING TO THEIR BODIES.

2. THE WORK BALANCES SATIRE AND SINCERITY WITHOUT SETTLING INTO EITHER. HOW DO YOU HOLD THAT BALANCE WHILE PERFORMING IT?

I PERFORM THE TASK SINCERELY. I HAVE ANOTHER VIDEO IN WHICH I DELIBERATELY IRON WRINKLES INTO MY FACE; THAT WORK IS MORE ANARCHIC, HUMOROUS, AND FURIOUS. IRONING, BY CONTRAST, IS A SERIOUS STATEMENT ABOUT THE HARM WE WILLINGLY INFLICT UPON OURSELVES IN PURSUIT OF PERFECTION.

3. THE IRON CARRIES HISTORIES OF CARE, LABOUR, AND PRESSURE. WHAT PERSONAL WEIGHT DOES THIS OBJECT BRING INTO THE WORK FOR YOU?

I WANTED THE ACTION TO BE PERFORMED WITH CARE. I TAKE MY TIME, SMOOTHING AND IRONING CAREFULLY, USING BOTH THE IRON AND MY HANDS. TRADITIONALLY, IRONING IS AN ACT OF CARE, CARE FOR THE OBJECT BEING IRONED, AND FOR THE PERSON WHO WILL WEAR IT. HERE, THAT CARE IS DIRECTED TOWARD MYSELF. SOME WOULD ARGUE THAT IRONING IS NOW UNNECESSARY, ESPECIALLY SINCE WE NO LONGER RELY ON IT TO KILL GERMS OR PARASITES, WHICH RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT WHY THE RITUAL PERSISTS.

4. BY PLACING THE VIDEO AMONG LAUNDRY AND AN IRONING BOARD, YOU EMBED THE WORK IN A DOMESTIC SCENE. WHAT DOES THAT SETTING ASK THE VIEWER TO CONFRONT ABOUT THEMSELVES?

THE SETTING IS DOMESTIC, ALLOWING ME TO COMMENT ON WOMEN'S LABOUR, ITS VALUE AND ITS PERSISTENT LACK OF RECOGNITION; IT IS A FEMINIST CRITIQUE. WOMEN QUIETLY CARRY OUT THESE TASKS, OFTEN INVISIBLY. WITHIN THIS FAMILIAR SCENE, THERE ARE FLEETING GLIMPSES OF VIOLENCE: THE HEAT OF THE IRON AND ITS POTENTIAL TO BRAND.

5. LOOKING AT IRONING NOW, DO YOU SEE IT MORE AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE, ACCOMMODATION, OR SOMETHING UNRESOLVED BETWEEN THE TWO?

I SEE THIS WORK AS A FORM OF LETTING GO. AS A WOMAN ARTIST, MY FACE REFLECTS THE LIFE I HAVE LIVED, AND THAT SHOULD BE ACKNOWLEDGED AND CELEBRATED RATHER THAN ERASED.

6. WHEN YOU FIRST IMAGINED IRONING YOUR OWN FACE, WHAT FEELING ARRIVED BEFORE THE IDEA?

"IF ONLY IT COULD BE THAT SIMPLE" WAS MY INITIAL THOUGHT. AND WHILE I HAVE BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE WITH AGEING, I STILL FEEL THE DESIRE TO PRESENT MY BEST SELF, AND THAT IS AN HONEST TENSION THAT MANY OF US LIVE WITH.

7. THE WORK EXPOSES A NEGOTIATION WITH AGEING RATHER THAN A DENIAL OF IT. WHO DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE NEGOTIATING WITH?

THE WORK IS ABOUT BECOMING COMFORTABLE NOT ONLY WITH MYSELF AND THE AGEING PROCESS, BUT ALSO WITH MY PLACE IN SOCIETY. I WANT TO SAY TO YOUNGER WOMEN, AND I HAVE A DAUGHTER, GIVE YOURSELVES A BREAK. DON'T CONFORM TO IMPOSED NORMS. YOU BE YOU.

8. HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THIS WORK AS A RETURN AFLAME?

I MAY BE OLDER, THAT DOES NOT MEAN I HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO SAY, LEARN OR EXPERIENCE. I HAVE A POWER THAT COMES FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE, AND I CONTINUE TO REIGNITE MYSELF: I KEEP MAKING WORK, LEARNING NEW SKILLS, AND PUSHING MY PRACTICE FORWARD. I AM CURRENTLY UNDERTAKING A PHD, WHICH FUELS MY THINKING AND HELPS STOKE MY ARTISTIC FIRE.