

Beyond the Visual

Audio guide

**HENRY MOORE
INSTITUTE**

Stop 5. Track 2.

Emilie Louise Gossiaux, *Doggirl* 2021

Doggirl is a ceramic sculpture. It lies flat on its back, torso facing upwards, on a low, rectangular plinth. It is a small, doll-sized figure: a hybrid of woman and dog, like a statuette of an Egyptian god. The figure has a dog's head, but human-like eyes with large lashes which fingertips reveal are incised into the surface; and a protruding snout and large nose with floppy ears, just like a Labrador. But she (let's call her that) has a woman's body, other than her six nipples or, given her dog-like nature, teats. She has an indented navel and pubic hair, like her eyes scratched into the surface, and human arms and legs, with hands that are clenched, and quite clumpy. The feet, which are not quite symmetrical, point into the air.

The figure is made of earthenware ceramic, matt rather than shiny, in an off-white colour. It feels cool to the touch, and tapping it lightly tells you that it is hollow. Perhaps it is cast in sections, like an Easter egg, then modified by hand. It certainly feels smoothed by hand rather than with a tool. Running your hands lightly over the object reveals the figure is attached to the plinth with fishing wire, which is barely visible even to those with unimpaired vision. A visceral effect is triggered by the reclining pose, with all its associations. There is, at least initially, almost a reluctance to touch. Some visitors say they feel uncomfortable exploring the body with their hands. Is this because of *Doggirl's* sexuality? She doesn't feel like a sexualised object. Or is it because of the figure's vulnerability

and associations with death? Because what she really resembles is an ancient votive figure: a figure offered to a deity. There is a tenderness here, and a fragility at odds with the determination suggested by the touch and grip of exploring hands. Poignantly, we learn that the artist morphed her own body with that of her beloved guide dog, a Labrador Retriever called London who recently passed away. The work is called *Doggirl* because it is a self-portrait of the artist and her dog conceived as a single entity.

And there's definitely something here about intimacy of scale: the familiarity that you can have with an object that's this size, that can be handled. There is such a temptation to lift the figure up, which in the gallery we can't do. This is reminiscent of prehistoric figurines that, though often presented vertically in museum vitrines, were made to be held in the hands. Here we're looking down on this figure, so it feels like a completely different experience, whether that experience is visual or through touch. And the fact that we can walk 360 degrees around the figure makes the plinth, as slab, an important part of the piece as a kind of essential support.

End of Stop 5, Track 2.

This is a transcript of an audio guide produced by Henry Moore Institute for the exhibition *Beyond the Visual*, on display from 28 November 2025 to 19 April 2026. For more information visit henry-moore.org/beyond-the-visual