

Some of the most distinctive depictions of “self” in art during the past century have been by female artists, beginning with those involved in Surrealism of the 1920s-40s, continuing in Conceptual and Performance Art of the 60s and 70s and paramount through serial waves of Feminist Art (70s and beyond), and also

central to Identity-based work and Narrative photography of the 1990s. *Body Double* brings together works by sixteen young female artists who utilize self-images in photographs and videos with arresting effects. Not all of these artists employ images of themselves exclusively, and not one of them would consider her work self-portraiture. What they do share, whether explicitly or tangentially—and due largely to the developments of Feminist Art—is a belief in the individual’s license to produce and control her own image. Each of these artists uses her image with awareness and for reasons of convenience (both causal and economical), and they all convey an interest in performance as well as the performative—a physical, conceptual, even psychological approach that covers a vast range of expression from cathartic to sardonic. Many have an intense interest or involvement in film, and others, a deep engagement with sculpture. Several are engaged with identity, yet an identity that sheds a female-versus-“other” dichotomy in favor of a current, urgent hybridity of the two. Most embrace humor as a subtle but essential element shaping the viewer’s reception of the work, which often verges on the empathic.

Particularly significant to the work in this exhibition is the deep-rooted influence of Surrealism, a movement in which women played a significant if often unorthodox role. Largely detached from the theories of its male figureheads, the female contingent tended to substitute “the male Surrealists’ love of hallucination and erotic violence with an art of magical fantasy and narrative flow,” and to move “toward laying claim to female subject positions within male-dominated movements,” states Whitney Chadwick. Looking forward to a “feminine poetics of the body... that would fully emerge only with the Feminist movement of the 1970s,” these female precursors “turned instead to their own reality... re-creat[ing] themselves as beguiling personalities, poised uneasily between the worlds of artifice (art) and nature, or the instinctual life.”¹ Such shifts of focus are found in the range of psychological and physical states exposed in paintings by Frida Kahlo and Dorothea Tanning circa the 1940s, for instance, and later in works that also served as vital precursors to those in *Body Double*. The power of the object, specifically its associations with the unconscious and the poetic, also plays heavily in Surrealist works. One such sculpture—Meret Oppenheim’s *Object* (1936) (a fur-covered teacup, spoon and saucer)—is specifically recalled in considering ROYA FALAHI’s photograph, *Disappearing Act: Now You See Me, Now You Don’t* (2006), in which tangled masses of hair on two satin-draped pedestals become fetishistic stand-ins for the artist. Falahi’s *Loom* (2006) is perhaps closest in this exhibition to a traditional bust portrait, but, taking Renee Magritte’s *Le*

ROYA FALAHI *Loom* (2006)



DANIELA STEINFELD *Soulsafari* (2000)



CARLEE FERNANDEZ *Bear Head, Arm and Leg Study I* (2004)



GINA OSTERLOH *Untitled (Turquoise Room #1)* (2006-07)

BARBARA PROBST *Exposure #18: N.Y.C., 498 7th Avenue, 02.26.03, 1:29 PM* (2003)



viol (The Rape) (1934) (a painting that replaces the face with a female torso) as a possible inspiration, substitutes the artist’s head with a mound of matted black hair that could double for an exaggeration of the female pubic region (or Magritte’s torso sans the combed part). A similar interest in sculpture informs CARLEE FERNANDEZ’s *Bear Study* series (2004), which merges her own body, through a series of performative acts captured and reproduced in large format chromogenic prints, with the preserved pelt, head, and paws of a bear. Inspired in part by the ritualism of Viennese Actionist performance, the results are suggestive of a hypnotic possession or a dream, a psychological portrait or an exorcism of the primal that exists within. GINA OSTERLOH is engaged with capturing and scrutinizing the unseen, including, in her *Turquoise Room* series (2006-07), the visceral and the space that it occupies between interior and exterior. Remarkably void of ego, this piece illustrates with simplicity, splendor, and vivid imagination the basic function of interacting with one’s environment: a *modus operandi* of ego itself. DANIELA STEINFELD interacts with environments and forms that attach to or conceal most parts of her body, creating new forms that we may recognize as appendages yet also deformities that merge and vacillate between human and alien. Like Falahi, Fernandez, and Osterloh, Steinfeld unleashes a sense of primordial emotion through a peculiar and personal interaction with materials. By masking at least part of their own bodies, these artists achieve an inverse effect of baring a hidden yet essential part of themselves.

Alluding to a different aspect of the surrealist object is BARBARA PROBST, whose multipart, time-lapse photographs evoke deconstructions of a host of historic precedents, from Eadweard Muybridge’s nineteenth-century photographic motion studies to film stills and fashion photography. Rather than the figure, however, it is the camera tripod that becomes significant, as it was in early surrealist photography and throughout feminist works (such as Jay DeFeo’s depictions of tripods (1975-78)). As Abigail Solomon-Godeau suggests, the tripod’s anthropomorphic attributes are “indicative of a masculine gaze/presence”²; similarly, in Probst’s time-warp-like works, the tripod serves as a stand-in for the viewer as she regards her/its (the tripod’s) paradoxical relationship between composition and perspective.

The oneiric and bizarre traits of Surrealism are conjured in JANAINA TSCHÄPE’s seminal *100 Little Deaths* (2001), one of the artist’s earliest series of enigmatic photographic images depicting her body prone in a global range of picture-postcard locales that are as exotic as they are strangely desolate. A film-noir sense of mystery is invoked through the *mis-en-scène* circumstances in these images, which allude to death or dreams as well as to an ongoing narrative of ritual and rebirth—an encapsulation of Ana Mendieta’s oeuvre, perhaps. Dreams and a sense of spatial and psychological exploration appear to be at the heart of KRISTINE THOMPSON’s photographs of her body impossibly submerged into the embellished hollow of a mattress, camouflaged beneath a diaphanous curtain, or wrapped in a sheet lying fetal position inside an aged wash basin. Like



JANAINA TSCHÄPE *100 Little Deaths, East Village* (2001)

KRISTINE THOMPSON *Untitled* (2006)



CAITLIN ATKINSON *Chapter 11, December, 2003* (2007)



Francesca Woodman's haunting images of her body seemingly merging with domestic objects and interiors, Thompson's images suggest a ghostly space infused with a delicate pathos that verges on the entomological.

Disfiguration and even death, referenced subtly and explicitly in works above by Thompson and Tschäpe (respectively), appear to be fixations of several other artists in *Body Double*. This focus can be ascribed in part to the influence of first-wave Feminist works that suggest or depict self-infliction, defacement, and violence, such as those by Mendieta and Woodman, and in performances by, for instance, Marina Abramovic and Yoko Ono. Solomon-Godeau suggests that such works invite a "symbolic and collective violence that is both misogynist and sexual," but she also advises that it is most appropriate to describe, in all these instances, "the artist... as an impersonal screen, a field of projection, upon which what is otherwise culturally and socially disavowed, repressed, or even taken for granted may be ritualistically expressed."³ As such, acts of hiding, merging, enduring physical pain, and even killing oneself off, as staged or real as they may seem, can be understood in terms of some degree of empowerment. CAITLIN ATKINSON enacts her own accidental death in *Chapter 11 (December 2003)*, apparently the aftermath of having fallen from an upended milk crate on which she had presumably been teetering while picking persimmons from a tree. The photographs' rich autumn colors—the ripe fruit, her crimson sweater, the dense bed of leaves and grass that must have softened her fall—heighten these vivid scenarios, much like film ads or stills that verge on the mythological or convey a clichéd sense of domestic serenity cum calamity. Yet death is never so explicit and compellingly perverse as in *Mathilde, Mathilde* (2000), in which artist MATHILDE TER HEIJNE wrestles and throws "herself" (her doppelgänger in the form of a replica sculpture of herself—her own "dummy") off a bridge into a river. Inspired by three films,⁴ tragic romances in which the female leads, all named Mathilde, commit suicide, the artist is both perpetrator and victim and, as such, is the tragicomic pinnacle of self-loathing which is so closely identified with the female psyche.

These and other works indicate the significance of role-playing that pervades the work in *Body Double*, an impetus stemming in part from what Solomon-Godeau has termed "the artist as field of projection." The assumption of alternate identities or alter-egos, as exemplified in important works by Eleanor Antin, Lynn Hershman and Adrian Piper, was famously accomplished by Cindy Sherman, whose *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80) "are not only photographic records of performances but, inversely, performative accounts of filmic images."⁵ KARA HEARN combines such precedents with an updated take on the recent phenomenon of the DIY video so commonly found on the web. *Eight Dying Scenes* (2007) are reenactments of famous dying scenes from eight blockbuster movies, including *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Titanic* (1997), and *Gladiator* (2000), all performed by the artist alone, with limited means, and within the interior of her apartment (a point that is brought home when her cat, in

one segment, is spotted sneaking out through the cat door). Playing different parts as necessary—lovers, friends, even enemies of the soon-to-be deceased—Hearn gives meticulous attention to the essential emotions and details and her resourceful use of whatever's at hand for rare effects is both fascinating and hilarious. SHANNON PLUMB takes role-playing even further by impersonating every imaginable track and field athlete, and even a compulsive, mustachioed face-stuffing commentator, in her slapstick silent film or comedic performance titled *Olympics (Track & Field)* (2005), which is shot on Super-8 film and transferred in as lo-tech a way as possible to video and DVD for effect. As writer, director, and star, Plumb pushes the idea of female supremacy to extremes, playing among the realms of individualism and group identity, history, mythology, and contemporaneity in ways that are as entertaining as they are tongue-in-cheek. A peculiar Freudian sense of role-playing pervades DESIREE HOLMAN's *Breath Holes* series of photographs (as well as sculpture and video), which show the artist in the roles of four male characters, literally inhabiting their skins, or rather latex body suits that she cast from male models. In several of the photographs, Holman appears as a combination of herself, her opposite, and/or some other counter-fantasy character, conflating polarities such as female/male, self/other, and, in *The Monster's Mate* (2005), portraying a schizophrenic pairing that conjures the freakish. Such works cleverly and humorously pictorialize more serious matters involved in self-exploration, including projection, ego, id, and self-doubt, among others.

Self-identity takes center stage in several works in *Body Double* that underscore the construction of the image of the artist herself. Works such as these point not just to a deeper psyche that lies beneath a mask, but also investigate "the elements that are involved in the structure of the façade itself" and, like many Feminist works, refer "to the repertoire of poses derived—variously—from advertising, fashion photography, erotica and pornography, pinups, and movies."⁶ These works also take their cue from the alternating personae of Sherman, as well as seminal political works by Piper, Lynda Benglis, Renee Cox and, more recently, Nikki S. Lee, examining the very nature of identity by touching on the societal conventions and stereotypes related not only to gender but also to ethnicity, race, class, and culture. HARUKO TANAKA, raised in England and Japan until she began her studies and career as an artist in the U.S., creates work that rises out of enduring and complex questions regarding self-identity and meaning. Her *Fit In Room* series (2000) combines a sense of self-exploration with the Fluxus ideals of artists such as Ono and John Cage, whose instructions for performances inspired Tanaka to go into a store, pick out clothing she liked, go into the dressing room to try each piece on until she was comfortable, and then take a photograph.⁷ The directness, boldness, and deadpan manner with which she executes this deceptively simple yet potentially angst-ridden task makes this series of intimately scaled photographs especially captivating. SUSAN LEE-CHUN, born in Korea and raised in the U.S., creates environments,



MATHILDE TER HEIJNE *Mathilde, Mathilde* (2000)



KARA HEARN *Eight Dying Scenes* (2007)



SHANNON PLUMB *Olympics (Track & Field)* (2005)

installations, performances, photographs, and videos that address polarities such as self/other and insider/outsider implicit in issues of racial and cultural identity. *Camouflage (Part II-The Escape)* (2007) captures the artist in a series of four images that mimic a stop-action motion sequence. Wearing a smartly tailored dress made from the same plaid fabric that completely covers the walls surrounding her, and masquerading as Sue, the innocent or “good” half of her two alter-egos (the other is Sioux) who dons a platinum blonde wig, she performs a series of actions captured by fast-shutter camera. Throughout the sequence, her emotion-laden face is what most urgently draws our attention as she physically struggles for freedom or, at the very least, some sort of meaning through escape. Half Crow Indian and half Irish, WENDY RED STAR combines her own ethnic and gender identities with conventional and stereotypical ways of representing them. Inspired by the dioramas at natural history museums, her *Four Seasons* (2006) series of photographs are artificial simulations of the Native American ensconced in nature. Positioning herself among these absurd accoutrements and motifs cleverly and comically takes issue with the exoticism and exploitation of women as well as Native Americans throughout cultural history (not to mention the equally clichéd seasons). Role-playing amalgamates with self-identity in LIZ COHEN’s astonishing and involved performance and installation project, *Bodywork*, in which she works to transform a vintage East German Trabant automobile into a customized 1973 Chevy El Camino, complete with low-rider hydraulics and motion sensors, while also transforming herself into a professional car model. *Roof* (2006) is one of a series of photographs (and potentially part of an upcoming calendar) capturing her posing with her Frankenstein-ish contraption, which, when finished to her satisfaction, will accompany her to various low-rider competitions across the country. Cohen is in complete control as she assumes and conflates the roles of male and female, east and west, and conceptual/performance art with custom-car culture.

In her essay *The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism*, Rosalind Krauss refers to what she calls the important “strategy of doubling.” Defined, the double “is the simulacrum, the second, the representative of the original... but in being seen in conjunction with the original, the double destroys the pure singularity of the first. Through duplication, it opens the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one-thing-after-another, or within another: of multiples burgeoning within the same.”⁸ Alluding to the photograph as the faithful trace of reality, Krauss also links this strategy to the “experience of *reality as representation* that constitutes the notion of the Marvelous or of Convulsive Beauty.”⁹ This idea takes on intriguing new dimensions when, rather than viewing history in progress from, in this case, Surrealism to Feminist Art, we view it retroactively through the lens provided by the sixteen young female artists in *Body Double*. Their multifarious and marvelous acts of doubling open our minds to the suggestion of infinite possibility. What could possibly be more liberating? —Julie Joyce January 2008

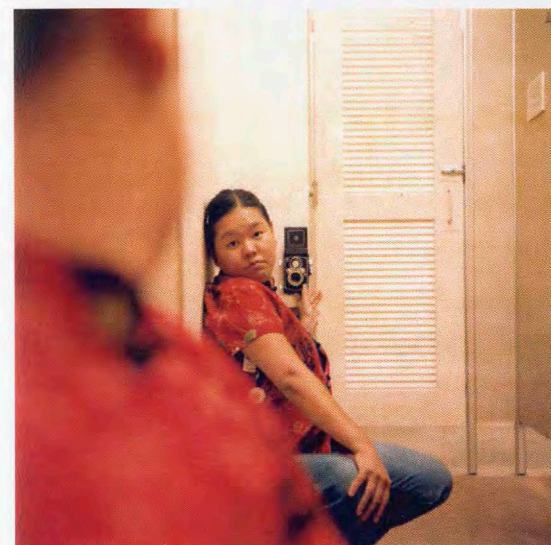


DESIREE HOLMAN *The Monster's Mate* (2005)

- 1 Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 310-313.
- 2 Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Woman Who Never Was: Self-Representation, Photography, and First-Wave Feminist Art,” *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007), 339.
- 3 Ibid., 343.
- 4 The three films are: Jean-Claude Brisseau’s *Noce blanche* (1989); Patrice Leconte’s *Le Mari de la coiffeuse* (1990); and François Truffaut’s *La Femme d’à côté* (1981). See Jill Dawsey, “Mathilde, Mathilde: The Artist and Her Double,” *Art Papers* vol. 31, no. 3 (May/June 2007), 32.
- 5 Amanda Cruz, “Movies, Monstrosities, and Masks: Twenty Years of Cindy Sherman,” *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art; Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 4.
- 6 Solomon-Godeau, “The Woman Who Never Was,” 339-340.
- 7 Haruko Tanaka, *Artist Talk*, Luckman Fine Arts Complex, Luckman Gallery, Cal State L.A., 9 October 2007.
- 8 Rosalind Krauss, “The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism,” *October* vol. 19 (winter 1981), 25.
- 9 Ibid., 28.



SUSAN LEE-CHUN *Camouflage (Part II-The Escape, 1, 2, 3 & 4)* (2007)



HARUKO TANAKA *Fit In Room Piece (#10)* (2005)



WENDY RED STAR *Four Seasons: Fall* (2006)

LIZ COHEN *Roof* (2006)



Body Double



CAITLIN ATKINSON
LIZ COHEN
ROYA FALAHI
CARLEE FERNANDEZ
KARA HEARN
DESIREE HOLMAN
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GINA OSTERLOH
SHANNON PLUMB
BARBARA PROBST
WENDY RED STAR
DANIELA STEINFELD
HARUKO TANAKA
MATHILDE TER HEIJNE
KRISTINE THOMPSON
JANAINA TSCHÄPE

Curated by Julie Joyce and Marco Rios

August 25 – October 13, 2007

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Cover: Desiree Holman, *Buck* (2005)
Design: Meryl Pollen Design

Works in the exhibition:

CAITLIN ATKINSON *Chapter 11, December, 2003*, Chromogenic print, 30 x 40 in.; *Chapter 14, August, 2005*, Chromogenic print, 24 x 30 in. [Both works Courtesy Foley Gallery, New York]; *Confirmations* (2007), Chromogenic print, 24 x 20 in. [Courtesy the artist]

LIZ COHEN *Hood* (2006), Chromogenic print mounted on Plexiglass, 50 x 60 in. [Courtesy the artist and Lawrimore Project, Seattle]; *Roof* (2006), Chromogenic print mounted on Plexiglass, 50 x 60 in. [Collection Aileen and Ben Krohn]

ROYA FALAHI *Disappearing Act: Now You See Me, Now You Don't* (2006), Chromogenic print (diptych), 20 x 24 in.; 20 x 24 in. [All works Courtesy the artist]; *Loom* (2006) Chromogenic print, 25 x 25 in.

CARLEE FERNANDEZ *Bear Head, Arm and Leg Study I* (2004), Chromogenic print, 32 x 40 in.; *Bear Head Study* (2004), Chromogenic print, 40 x 32 in.; *Bear Head Study II* (2004), Chromogenic print, 40 x 32 in.; [All works Courtesy Acuna-Hansen Gallery, Los Angeles]

KARA HEARN *Eight Dying Scenes* (2007), Single channel DVD loop, 4:30 [Courtesy the artist]

DESIREE HOLMAN *Buck* (2005), Archival ink jet print mounted on masonite, 30 x 19-7/8 in.; *The Monster's Mate* (2005), Archival ink jet print mounted on masonite, 19-7/8 x 30 in.; *Our emotional networks...* (2005), Archival ink jet print mounted on masonite, 19-7/8 x 30 in. [All works Courtesy the artist]

SUSAN LEE-CHUN *Camouflage (Part II- The Escape, 1, 2, 3 & 4)* (2007), Lambda print (four separate parts), 24 x 12 in. each [All works Courtesy Spinello Gallery, Miami]

GINA OSTERLOH *Press and Release #3* (2007), Chromogenic print mounted on aluminum, 20 x 24 in.; *Untitled (Turquoise Room #1)* (2006-07) Light jet print, 48 x 60 in. [All works Courtesy the artist]

SHANNON PLUMB *Olympics (Track & Field)* (2005), Single channel DVD, 18:00 [Courtesy Sara Meltzer Gallery, New York]

BARBARA PROBST *Exposure #18: N.Y.C., 498 7th Avenue, 02.26.03, 1:29 PM* (2003), Ultrachrome ink on cotton paper (four parts), 44 x 29-1/2 in. each [Collection Pilara Family Foundation, Courtesy Murray Guy, New York]

WENDY RED STAR *Four Seasons: Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer* (2006), Light jet print on gator board (four separate parts), 16 x 20 in. each [All works Courtesy the artist]

DANIELA STEINFELD *Multiple Mind* (1999-2000), Chromogenic print mounted on sintra, 56-1/2 x 42-1/2 in.; *Soulsafari* (2000), Chromogenic print mounted on sintra, 42-1/2 x 56-1/2 in.; *Tierheim / Animal Shelter* (2000), Chromogenic print mounted on sintra, 56-1/2 x 42-1/2 in. [All works Courtesy Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects]

HARUKO TANAKA *Fit In Room Piece (#'s 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12)*, Summer 2000 (2000), Chromogenic print (9 separate parts), 10-7/8 x 10-7/8 in. each [Collection Barbara Cohn (#'s 6 & 10); Collection Bia Gayotto (#8); Collection Joni Gordon/Newspace, Los Angeles (#9); and Courtesy the artist (#'s 4, 5, 7, 11 & 12)]

MATHILDE TER HEIJNE *Mathilde, Mathilde* (2000), Single channel DVD, 4:29 [Courtesy Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects]

KRISTINE THOMPSON *Untitled* (2006), Chromogenic print, 20 x 20 in.; *Untitled* (2006), Chromogenic print, 20 x 20 in.; *Untitled* (2006), Chromogenic print, 20 x 20 in. [All works Courtesy the artist]

JANAINA TSCHÄPE *100 Little Deaths, Amalfi* (2001), Chromogenic print, 33 x 48-1/2 x 1-1/2 in.; *100 Little Deaths, Blue Room* (2002), Chromogenic print, 33 x 48-1/2 x 1-1/2 in.; *100 Little Deaths, East Village* (1998), Chromogenic print, 33 x 48-1/2 x 1-1/2 in. [All works Courtesy the Heather and Tony Podesta Collection, Washington, D.C.]