



Conceptualizing the Body: Gaze, Masquerade, and Spectacle

Chan-Hyo Bae, Alexander Haessner, Eric van Hove, Shuli Sadé, Aaron Sheppard, Genevieve White, Michael Zheng

Curated by Hyewon Yi

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Opening Reception and Performances: Wednesday, October 26, 2011, 5pm – 8 pm

The Amelie A. Wallace Gallery at SUNY College at Old Westbury is pleased to announce the opening of a group exhibition of seven artists' works addressing cultural, social, political, and gender identities as expressed through the body. Comprising photography, video, and performance art, **Conceptualizing the Body** offers the viewer an opportunity to reconsider our practice of looking, and issues of vanity, gender stereotypes, notions of the self and others, the limitations of social roles, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships. Three performances will be presented during the opening reception, one of which involves active audience participation.

Chan-Hyo Bae (b.1975, South Korea; resides in London) contributes two photographic series for this exhibition. Three photographs from *Existing in Costume* are self-portraits of the artist disguised as meticulously dressed aristocratic women, inspired by traditional English portraits. Whether standing or seated, the white-powdered face of the poser Bae contrasts with the true Asian skin tone of the artist Bae, while his hands and Adam's apple reveal his masculine identity. In excerpts from the series *Fairy Tale Project*, Bae offers choreographed scenes from the European fairy tales *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel*, and *Snow White*, in which he plays the female protagonists. Bae's work de-constructs these stereotypical images that have so pervasively occupied the psyches of children for centuries.

Alexander Haessner (b.1974, Germany; resides in New York) trained in commercial photography, mainly in advertising and the fashion industry. He presents *Archetypes*, a series of four large portraits (4 ft x 6 ft) in which two models, one male and white, the other female and black, singly occupy each photo. Haessner displays the androgynous characteristics of his models' bare upper bodies as they stand before simple cardboard backdrops. In one work, the tattooed male figure (posed by Aaron Sheppard, a participant in this exhibition), looks away from the camera while wearing a red paper ear, an allusion to Van Gogh. The black female model confidently engages the camera's lens, evincing the power of her physical beauty. Haessner has said that the contrasting images of his two models suggest the Jungian archetypes *Anima* (the female within the male) and *Animus* (the male within the female).

Eric van Hove (b. 1975, Algeria; resides in Brussels), a Cameroon-raised Belgian, is a widely traveled conceptual artist whose ideas revolve around local and global socio-cultural issues and histories. To this exhibition, van Hove contributes images from *The Metragram Series*, an ongoing photographic series begun in 2005. This partly performance-based work shows the artist inking the abdomens (symbolic of the womb) of women in different contexts around the world: a Shi'ah Muslim woman in Tehran; an Israeli soldier in Jerusalem; an African woman of Bamako, Mali; and an elderly woman of the Aeta group, Philippines. Interested in the historical representation of the *Other*, van Hove investigates his topic by visiting diverse regions, some redolent of sensitive histories of religious conflict, imperial wars, and the politics of colonialism.

Shuli Sadé (b. Israel; resides in New York)'s photo-documentation project *Urban Arcadians*, begun in 2004, consists of images of New Yorkers who frequent weekend homes along the Hudson River. Mostly cultured individuals randomly selected by the artist, they appear in casual attire surrounded by scenic landscapes. Their backgrounds manipulated for painterly effect, Sadé's portraits are reminiscent of the Hudson River School of the mid-19th Century. The reserved appearances of the sitters contrast with the passionate colors of their seasonal natural surroundings, suggesting that their calm façades may conceal a complexity at which the viewer can only guess. Collectively, the images suggest a sense of community amongst Sade's subjects in which they possess an awareness of themselves, the photographer, their environs, and their social class despite the diversity of family units and unconventional lifestyles they bring to the region.

Aaron Sheppard (b.1976, Nebraska; resides in Los Angeles) will perform *Landscape; or, The Modern Epimetheus*, a site-specific work developed for the Amelie A. Wallace Gallery, in which Sheppard examines the symbolism of Epimetheus ("hindsight"), the brother of Prometheus ("foresight"), in relation to the artist's work and its meaning: artist and art, subject and object. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, the novel from which Sheppard derives his performance title, brings into question the focal point of the artist in this work: Is he painter or performer or the painting itself? Sheppard drew inspiration for his work from Yves Klein, Willem de Kooning, and Marilyn Mintor's "Mouth" video series, as well as the opening sequence of *Barbarella*, in which Jane Fonda rolls across a transparent table to simulate the weightlessness of space.

Genevieve White (b. 1983, Quebec; resides in New York) will perform the new work *Convex Mirror Lozenge Lounge*, in which she dresses as a bride in a wedding gown trapped in a cage of mirrors overpainted with black bars that suggest a prison. The veiled bride will be wrapped in black tape and then run inside the cage. White's performance comments on the social pressures of marriage and the domestic lives of women. The reflected image of the self heightens the dark paradox that lurks behind the spectacle of the ceremony. Archived performances by White will also be presented, including early performances that use the bare body as a fundamental vocabulary (reminiscent of 70s Feminist works by Hannah Wilke and Ana Mendieta), and more recent works that test endurance and transform the body into a living sculpture (*Masked Cocoon*, *Unravel*, and *Earth + Breathing: A Dance for the Bones*).

Michael Zheng (b. 1965, China; resides in San Francisco), a veteran software designer who became a conceptual and performance artist, will contribute a performance utilizing the participation of exhibition visitors on opening night. Videos of past performances will be presented alongside site-specific photographs such as *Bend* and *Split*, a photo-documentary of Zheng's performance at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco in which he struggled to fit his body into confined spaces of the museum building. His subversive body of work follows the tradition of Institutional Critique, but goes beyond critical inquiry into the systems of museums and art galleries. Performance works like *Artist for Hire* (offering free services to people for twenty-four hours) and *Center of Europe* (repetitive whistling of the phrase "Center of Europe" in Morse code while standing at the geographical center of Europe, Lithuania) are meant to challenge the established social systems.

A reception to mark the opening of ***Conceptualizing the Body*** will be held from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm on Wednesday, October 26, 2011. Opening night will feature three-hour performances by Aaron Sheppard and Michael Zheng. Genevieve White's performance will begin at 7pm.

The exhibition remains on view through December 1, 2011. Gallery hours are Monday through Thursday between 12 pm and 5pm, and by appointment.

Conceptualizing the Body: Gaze, Masquerade, and Spectacle, received support from the Visual Arts Department of SUNY College at Old Westbury and Sololab, New York (www.sololab.com).

For further information about the exhibition, please contact Gallery Director Hyewon Yi at yih@oldwestbury.edu or 646-421-5863.