

The Missing Body is an exhibition featuring a dozen artists from across Canada and around the world whose work centers on the body and identity in ways that can be conceptualized as performance art, even though the artist's body is not physically or visibly present in the work. This exhibition takes place in several locations in Lethbridge's core throughout the summer, in galleries as well as in offsite spaces, and features installation, sculptural and photographic work, video, live performances in which the public is invited to participate, and interventions into public space.

THE MISSING BODY

I am investigating the possibility that something substantial can be made from the outline left after my body has disappeared. My hunch is that the affective outline of what we've lost might bring us closer to the bodies we want still to touch than the restored illustration can.

(Peggy Phelan: *Mourning Sex*, p. 3)

Accepted definitions of performance art agree that, at its most basic, performance art requires the presence of a body in space over time—physical, rather than just conceptual or figurative presence. *The Missing Body* challenges that definition, arguing that it must not be taken for granted that the *art* of a performance exists in the artist's body.

This exhibition explores the concept of performance through an investigation of art in which the artist's body is obscured, hidden, or simply not present in the final manifestation of the presented work. I propose four methodologies for removing the artist's body from performative work:

1. Work/artists that engage others to enact the performance.

This methodology covers all people who volunteer, are hired, coerced, contracted, or are otherwise obligated through some kind of agreement to perform in a work of art. The defining characteristic is that the artist intends for it to be considered a performance work, though the performers may be actors, musicians, painters, construction workers, or anyone else.

2. Work that is activated, created or completed by audience transgressions in the gallery or presentation space.

Transgression is the key element of this work, as it creates the element of risk that enables the performative moment. In this context, I use the word "transgression" to mean any act, action, or response to an artwork which results in a performance, even as slight as an embodied affect. Intentionality of the artist is important in this methodology; any audience member of any artwork may transgress any number of boundaries within a presentation space, and that may result in what they do being something considered performative (by them, the artist, or anyone else), but I am solely interested in those works where part of the *artist's intention* is that they be transgressed upon. I am not necessarily concerned with whether the artist would explicitly use the word "performance" in relation to this kind of work, as I know that the definition of performance art is extremely contested, but that the artist has built into the art a desire that the audience would activate the work is the defining characteristic of this methodology.

The fact that the audience is the performer creates crucial opportunities for connection between artist and audience, audience and artwork, and perhaps most importantly, audience and the concepts and issues foundational to the work. The potential for opening dialogue, for creating moments of empathy, is what make these methodologies particularly relevant.

3. Object-based artworks that are stand-ins for the artists' own bodies.

These objects may be the result of performative actions (performance ephemera or documents), or works that are meant to allow the artist to be present ("performing") in the space while providing the relative safety and detachment of physical distance. They may be literal analogues for the artist, as in Rachel Herrick's *Obeasts*, which are exact replicas of her body, or they may be symbolic, as in Michelle Lacombe's *Watery*

Bodies. This category of performance is less about inventing new ways to talk about what is essentially sculpture/installation and more about learning, as artists, to conceptualize art in ways which give the audience agency, allowing for their development of new ways of knowing and avenues to deeper connection with the artists, the work, and the ideas within.

4 Artists whose bodies are hidden within the work.

There are many different ways for bodies to be hidden within performance. Costumes, obstructive props, and employment of separate performance and viewing spaces are but a few of the ways that artists can be physically present yet also absent from the performance. Artists may even be hidden by virtue of the fact that the audience is unsure of which person in a roomful of people is the artist.

Via Phelan's reading of the surveilled body which suggests that in the absence of eye contact, the observed body does not exist, even those artists whose bodies are physically visible, if their vision is obscured, can be considered hidden. Sam Guerrero harnesses this approach in his piece *Still Trying for a Breakthrough* by encasing his head in a piñata; he resists the controlling power of the gaze, and performs in his own world. Mami Takahashi is farcically visible in her *Hiding/Observing* project, yet she, too, avoids becoming owned by the spectatorial gaze.

Risk, transgression, and a false illusion of distance are all potential factors in this approach that are taken on by both artist and audience member, facilitating a capacity for intimacy between artist/art and audience that few artworks can.

In terms of risk, transgression and a false illusion of distance, care must be taken to create an antagonistic space, one with awkward tension that has the capacity for viewers to use an ontological gaze and therefore an empathetic one. Designing the project so that the audience is treated with respect, as an equal player in the exchange of knowledge that is the performance can help mitigate the potential risks of the audience transgressing the performance space in unsafe and unacceptable ways, because of the lack of the human connection that can foster that empathetic response.

These four methodologies can be effective strategies for opening dialogue about concepts and ideas that are otherwise be difficult to broach, particularly those topics that address corporeality and identity.

Removing the artist's body from the performance creates opportunities for those on the outside of the performance to step inside the work – physically, conceptually, or symbolically. By de-emphasizing their own bodies, performance artists refocus attention away from themselves, privilege others' experiences, dismantle boundaries between performer and audience, and disrupt unequal power dynamics in the presentation space. Artists can use these strategies to, among other things, make work about sociocultural issues and give voice to people within marginalized groups, including those whose race, class, gender, ability, bodies, or sexuality differ from the dominant culture and who are systematically silenced. They can also use these strategies to resist the dominant narrative, resist their own victimization or re-traumatization, or challenge the role of the institution and those within it.

Re-centering where the art resides takes the spotlight off of the object or the body and shines a light on the margins. Denying the artist's centrality as the locus of the performance rejects the rarified position of the artist, hiding one body in order to substitute others' bodies, knowledge and expertise in their place. This project proposes to broaden the ways institutions, artists and audiences think about performance art, fostering opportunities for deeper connections and meaningful dialogue.

Through methodological approaches that provoke risk, transgression, distance, and intimacy via an tactics designed to de-emphasize the artist's body, I hope to enable a shift in focus from my body to others' bodies, the othered body, embodiment as a concept, and subject matter unrelated to the body altogether. So doing, the work can effectively build empathetic and understanding relationships within the gallery while simultaneously creating space for a careful examination of audience response to the work, an essential element of the overarching research project.

I intend to encourage a critical dismantling of the arbitrary boundaries that continue to enact violence upon those marked as different. There is much theory to support this research, and a need for the ideas to be made visible and accessible to a broader public via creative production.

Vito Acconci

Printmaking might be considered the ultimate form of reproduction. It is the laboured and deliberate translation of an image into a format which allows its replication in great number. Vito Acconci was making prints as performance in the early 1970s, using his body variously as press, matrix and substrate; the three pieces included in *The Missing Body* represent not only innovative ways of looking at performance, but of thinking about printmaking as well. Though his body was essential to the production of these works (not just because, as most artists do, he produced them using the labour of his body, but because his body provided the “ink,” the “paper,” and the image of the work), it is absent from the final product – but is it still a form of reproduction?

According to Peggy Phelan, in the case of performance in which the artist’s body is hidden, it still resists reproduction. In *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*, Phelan writes:

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *Of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance (*Unmarked* 146).

Performances in which the artist is present but hidden, such as Vito Acconci’s *Seedbed* (1972) where the artist is laying hidden under the floor of the gallery, masturbating, happen in the present and then disappear, though they were not *visibly* present to begin with They must be imagined *as* disappearing.

The artist who hides their body within the performance does not have the opportunity to be a witness to the work, but neither does the audience have an opportunity to witness the performance in a traditional way. The desire for mastery over that which is represented, which is created in the viewer through the process of looking, can best be resisted by denying the gaze.

Blair Brennan

Brennan's work very often employs the branding iron: on the wall, on rawhide, leather, paper. It evokes the cowboy, the wild west, the manly man, but also pain, sacrifice, the indelible mark. *Blood + Time* represents a slight shift to focus specifically on the marked human. By using the devices of the tattoo artist rather than the cow hand, he references the urban (rather than the rural), the contemporary (rather than the romantic), the aesthetic (rather than the functional). The needle is cleaner, more precise than the brand. It also implies consent in the making of the image – a choice made by the wearer to receive the mark, and the notion that the mark was self-selected. (Brands are, in every sense, the mark of the brander; tattoos are a collaboration meant to represent the symbol of and for the wearer.) There is no ink in this machine, but the process is much the same. The artist is the performer in absentia as the tattoo-er/markmaker, and yet the audience member is the performer as it is they who must choose to mark their flesh, they who must sit down at the machine, and they who must mete out their own pain. This work brings the absent artist and the audience member into extremely close proximity; one quite literally feels the pain of the artist. The mark, YOLO (You Only Live Once), urges the audience to participate, while its cultural connotation simultaneously derides their lack of class. YOLO, the call of the dudebro popularized by hip hop artist Drake, suggests a carpe diem attitude that implies living life to the fullest but which has in fact come to symbolize reckless and irresponsible behaviour characterized by unexamined, macho bravado (such as, say, clamping your arm into a bed of razor-sharp needles?)

In "Making Art Like a Man!", David Garneau says:

"The branding iron, with its mark, is Brennan's obsession. It has a flexible power. I see it as a profound symbol for the mark-of-the-father. The long, firm, hot rod with the ability to imprint itself numerous times is a fine phallic and male fertility symbol. It is, he explains, a painful marker of territory and property. It is a sign of masculine patrimony, an inheritance that is a privilege as well as a burden, making much of Brennan's work a sign of pain and the possibility of redemption. ("Making Art Like a Man!" David Garneau, *Making it Like a Man: Canadian masculinities in practice* p. 73-74)

The tattoo has less patriarchal, less phallic imagery (though not entirely devoid). It is at least as ritualistic, however, eschewing fire for ink, less primitive; there is more of a reference to the pen, the brush, the civilized, the artistic, the intellectual. The rite performed by the disciplined/proficient on the uninitiated; both, however, consenting to the performance that creates an image on the body of one.

The work also references the bed of nails – in popular western imagery, an unfathomable "Eastern" device, evoking the image of a torturous act performed as proof of one having attained a higher state, achieved through the practice of enduring the act itself. Used in the Western world in magic tricks or feats of strength, the bed of nails proves not so much torturous as an illusion of physics; the distribution of the user's weight over many nails dissipates the energy such that the nails are not in danger of puncturing the skin, even when cinderblocks are placed on the abdomen of the user and hit with a sledgehammer. *Blood + Time* is not that kind of bed of nails; it doesn't contain that many needles. This device has the potential to draw blood.

The tattoo and the bed of nails call to mind the underground, the ritual, the magic/k, the harnessing of pain as a way of learning to control, and thereby transcend it. Brennan's interest in pain clearly has its roots in an examination of masculinity, but it also has roots in a deep embodied knowledge of pain. The tangible absence of the body in his work can be read as a resistance of, and transcendence of his experience of pain; where there is no (physical) body, there is no (physical) pain. Brennan's work literally calls to perform – YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE! Take a chance! Its title, too, urges the viewer to act – In Real Life – here, and now. The squirm, the shock are not enough – Brennan asks: what are you waiting for?

Through the intrinsic concept of loss, Peggy Phelan explains performance art's "fundamental bond" with ritual, (*Unmarked* 152) especially in performance that uses physical pain, via its evocation of the (symbolic) death of the performer, which elicits a promise to remember that which is lost. Blair Brennan's work adopts the ritual as both subject and method, and perhaps it is for this reason that there is such an easy affinity between his (sculptural, installation, drawing, print) work and performance. *Blood + Time* asks the audience

not to witness the death of the performer, but to become the performer; it asks the audience to become willing to die and so doing be reborn. In being willing to die, the viewer ritually enacts his own death and carries on his arm the symbolic death of the artist. The potential to cause physical pain is not what makes this work powerfully affective, but its potential to reach one's deepest fears of mortality. The artist, the absent executioner, acknowledges that the viewer must face this fear alone. Having faced the fear, however, the audience is bonded to the artist and to others who perform the ritual.

Performance art, Phelan believes, bridges the gap between two realities: the corporeal and the psychic. (167) It is a type of magic that lights up the space between the opposing ideas about what is real, and illuminates the Whole that exists in between but is rarely seen. Brennan's work often references (and, I think the artist would freely admit, literally conjures) magic: the performance of rituals, the creation and invocation of spells, the treatment of art as holy. He has talked about an interest in syncretism (the integration of one set of beliefs and practices into another) as a way of explaining his incorporation of Christian imagery and magic/k symbols in his work. What is more striking to me is his apparently syncretic combination of the systems of **art** and magic, and how he harnesses magic to make art which has the power to heal.

David Cross talks about body art, the performance genre of the 1960s and '70s as the first art that attempted to reduce the invisible divide between art and audience (thereby destroying the art/life barrier) by creating performances that would not allow the audience to distance themselves from the work or their visceral response to it, forcing them to confront their own limitations. He suggests that contemporary entertainment (e.g. David Blaine, Chris Angel, Fear Factor) has usurped the position of body art. Brennan's *Blood + Time*, referencing the culture of contemporary theatre of shock, does not shrink the divide between art and audience, it removes it completely, providing the audience an opportunity to not just confront knowledge, but to create it; to be the artist, the performer, and the canvas as well.

Our contemporary culture of the spectacle, of body modification, of the shock factor and one-upsmanship make body art less effective today, and has brought it to a level of kitsch. But for artists like Brennan whose work references popular culture and the kitsch, and who is not interested in shock, this is an effective medium to use towards slightly less bombastic ends. The work is not shocking, because it does not show the audience blood or gore, nor a screaming artist. It invites them to imagine spilling some of their own, and to clean it up responsibly before they go and leave the space as tidy as they found it. In personal correspondence with the curator, Brennan says he wants to evoke an "I-want-to-hurt-you-in-an-abandoned-warehouse" sensibility; however the work will function more in an "I-want-to-hurt-myself-in-an-abandoned-warehouse-and-clean-it-up-before-I-leave" way.

David Cross

In my work, I often talk about the taboo body – one which society deems unsuitable. People with taboo bodies are silenced, they do not see their experience reflected in the dominant narrative, and they are given cultural messages that they should not exist. David Cross' work focuses on what he calls the non-preferred body; similar to the taboo body, the non-preferred body includes any body which society considers valueless; the revolting, the abject, the grotesque. Rather than describing it as the "abnormal" body, as Foucault did— implying that the nature of the problem exists in and on the body (i.e. not "normal")— In "Some Kind of Beautiful: the grotesque body in contemporary art," Cross uses the word "non-preferred" to remove the focus from the body as the site of the issue and place it on the society which rejects it. (53) He borrows this concept from film theorist Kaja Silverman who, in *The Threshold of the Visible World*, suggests a need to stop referring to bodies in terms of a hierarchy of characteristics ("good bodies" and "bad bodies"), and refer to bodies in terms of a matter of choice ("bodies we prefer" and "bodies we do not prefer"). (Cross 12)

Cross' theoretical project, while very similar to my own, focuses specifically on physical difference that can be discussed in terms of social value as expression of the extent to which a body is considered desirable. The "un-preferred" body is the body which nobody loves; more explicitly, the un-preferred body is the body that nobody *can* love.

As implied by his use of the word "non-preferred," Cross is less interested in engaging an investigation into the body itself, and more interested in society's response to it, through creating opportunities that encourage the audience to interrogate their role in a system which creates hierarchies of value based on physical appearance. These opportunities, in Cross' art (as in much of my own, older, work), are extremely active, inviting the audience to literally climb onto the work.

Bounce is a large, bright red inflatable play structure that is set up in spaces which encourage the public to interact with, and play on it. Nothing about it appears out of the ordinary; hill-like, it presents a challenge to those interacting with it. In order to reach the summit, one must make a concerted effort to climb its smooth, steep surface. It is only upon reaching the top that the audience might discover the work's secret; that the artist is inside the inflatable sculpture, just below the surface, underneath the audience member, and that they are implicated in the artist's physical discomfort – perhaps even pain.

Pump is a bright yellow inflatable that requires two participants to engage in a ridiculous yet intimate activity by wearing the object on their heads and inflating the object with foot pumps in order to maintain its shape.

Cross claims that he wants his work to be deeply affective through the engagement of imagery that is both attractive and repellant, leaving the viewer hovering in an uncanny in-between. His work seems to harness that space, not only in terms of the horrific (which visual and performance art is very good at exploiting) but the joyfulness of carefree play with which to butt it up against.

Though he denies that the work is intentionally masochistic, (and, having made work that is similarly physically taxing, I completely believe him), I would argue that Cross' *Bounce* employs J. Jack Halberstam's "radical passivity" and "passive masochism" (*The Queer Art of Failure* 40) in order to, as he says, "create unresolvable conundrums" and "shift the participant's decision making to a level of uncertainty." (Cross 13) One of the ways he accomplishes this (as I do in my own work) is through the absence of instructions or rules of engagement with the work; the audience is left completely free to make up their minds about how to engage the work. By presenting the audience an ethical dilemma wrapped up in a tempting package topped with the prettiest bow of permission, Cross' work is not only aesthetically attractive and repellant, but conceptually as well. At the completion of their experience of the work, a participant is likely to be as affected by their own decisions regarding the work as they would be by the physical realities of the work itself.

Mandy Espezel

Mandy Espezel's interest in interrogating her subjectivity as a white woman complicates her works; the art resides in the space between sculpture and performative object. Heads and faces are missing, therefore the audience's gaze is denied, and yet through their overt, objectified sexuality and submission they still foster a desire in the viewer for ownership and mastery. Mastery in this case means a desire to engage deeper ways of knowing through touch; Espezel's works beg to be felt, fondled, caressed, held. Thus the audience becomes the performer, and the Other. The sculptures clearly reside in the world of objecthood, and not thingness. Because they harness an artworld authority instead of a real-world one, they rely on that need to touch to create their performativity – not an immediate embodied performativity generated by “things” of the outside world, but a physical performativity produced through the action of the viewer in response to the physicality of the work.

As a list of objects, the works Espezel has included in *The Missing Body* read as uncomfortably comedic and uneasily sexual as they appear in person: one stubbly leg with pink mary-jane; disembodied breast with erect nipple; matching right and left legs; kneeling torso with tan lines (no head); tiny figure, faceless. The sculptures and their sensual, tactile pedestals may beg to be touched, but they also fight against the viewer's prayers that no one should notice if they did, that the deep pile of the fun fur surface on which they rest leave no trace of their fingers. Many sculptures evoke the desire for a tactile experience; what makes Espezel's work performative is that the desire to touch her works is directly connected to the specific tensions the artist is hoping to create. These tensions are related not only to craving for haptic knowledge of the work, but to themes of sexuality, anxiety, embodiment, and identity (relative to gender, race, and class).

Mandy Espezel's works in *The Missing Body* are objects that, in my opinion, are only fully knowable when touched. Curating them into a gallery exhibition is, in part, a function of deciding to resist the inherent normativity of the gallery space. Even if (or, some might argue, *especially if*) the artist and the gallery do not allow work to be touched, in the formal setting of the gallery the work becomes *more* performative because of the tension between desire and expectation; the desire for the haptic knowledge expressed by the work and the expectation of appropriate audience behaviour. Espezel's sculptural objects and the environments she places them in explicitly evoke this desire for a physical experience of the work, through the use of varied textures, the scale of the work relative to the viewer's body and hands, and elements designed to provoke temptation to transgress the boundaries of the institution.

Sam Guerrero

There are many different ways for bodies to be hidden within performance. Costumes, obstructive props, and employment of separate performance and viewing spaces are but a few of the ways that artists can be physically present yet also absent from the performance. Artists may even be hidden by virtue of the fact that the audience is unsure of which person in a roomful of people is the artist.

Phelan discusses how, considering the spectator as the person in the dominant position, an inability to have one's gaze returned constructs the other's body as lost. The dominant figure cannot control that which cannot return its gaze; in the absence of eye contact, the observed body does not exist. Via this reading of the surveilled body, even those artists whose bodies are physically visible, if their vision is obscured, can be considered hidden. Sam Guerrero harnesses this approach in his piece *Still Trying for a Breakthrough* by encasing his head in a piñata; he resists the controlling power of the gaze, and performs in his own world.

The artist who hides their body within the performance does not have the opportunity to be a witness to the work, but neither does the audience have an opportunity to witness the performance in a traditional way. Phelan describes how the desire for mastery over that which is represented, which is created in the viewer through the process of looking, can best be resisted by denying the gaze.

Representation fosters a desire for mastery/ownership; Phelan quotes Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*: "the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know" (Foucault 62). As a description of the performer/viewer relationship, power belongs to the audience; the performer is put in a position of providing a service to another who controls the decision to accept or reject the offer.

So by removing their body from the performance altogether and disallowing the viewer to confront their gaze, the artist resists not only objectification, but resists the propagation of the dominance of the viewer, and of the self as other.

Even work in which a body appears to be present but the viewer's gaze is denied, this resistance can be harnessed. In encasing his head in a piñata in *Still Trying for a Breakthrough*, Sam Guerrero is not only cutting himself off from the outside world, he is refusing the viewer's access to his gaze. According to Phelan, "The spectator's inability to meet the eye *defines* the other's body as lost; the pain of this loss is underlined by the corollary recognition that the represented body is so manifestly and painfully there." (*Unmarked* 156)

In his video for *The Missing Body*, Sam Guerrero battles with his internalized colonialism, literally trying to beat it out of himself. A colourful piñata encasing his head, the artist bashes himself with a stick in an attempt to free himself of the strictures of the cultural signifiers that mark him as other. As an artist of multiple ethnic backgrounds, Guerrero considers the piñata (with its own complicated history as an object used in indigenous rituals but adopted by missionaries as a Catholic pedagogical tool) an apt symbol for his hybrid identity. Because that multifaceted identity is hidden; because Guerrero reads as Hispanic within the dominant narrative, he is invisible within his work even when his body is present. Hiding his head inside a piñata renders this fact explicit; he is not a person, he is a caricature of a culture. Guerrero's rage seems at first to be misdirected at himself rather than the oppressive dominant culture; however, because that culture has so perfectly mapped itself onto his body, his identity, the artist makes clear that lashing out is, eventually, much the same as 'lashing in.'

Guerrero's deceptively simple work is multifaceted, allowing for many other readings – that he is trying to break out of a stifling definition of self which is suffocating him, that his perceived identity as a Hispanic man demands a level of macho masculinity with which he struggles to both maintain and free himself of, and that to shatter the confines of the external identifiers imposed upon him would release a shower of the treasures which are his potentiality.

Guerrilla Girls

The Guerrilla Girls have been hiding their bodies in their performances since the 1980s. As Phelan notes, : By refusing to participate in the visibility-is-currency economy which determines value in “the art world,” the members of the group resist the fetishization of their argument that many are, at the moment, quite ready to undertake. By resisting visible identities, the Guerrilla Girls mark the failure of the gaze to possess, and arrest, their work.” (*Unmarked* 19)

They also harness radical negativity in the project of creating a utopia. Stickers and postering campaigns such as those undertaken by the Girls are performative in multiple ways; the act of political defiance in the act itself is a performance, though meant to be undertaken in secret, invisibly. Then the stickers and posters themselves become sites for performance by the public, as they create a space for dialogue (people talking about them, writing on them etc). and evoke a physically performative response (defacing them, ripping them down, etc.). In *Cruising Utopia*, Jose Esteban Muñoz claims:

The performances that the (stickers/posters) demand from viewers open the possibility of critical theory and intervention; they encourage lucidity and political action. They are calls that demand, in the African American vernacular culture, a response. The response is sometimes an outpouring of state ideology, yet at other times the responses are glimpses of an actually existing queer future in the present.... The (sticker/poster) functions as a mode of political pedagogy that intends to publicize the state’s machinations of power. While technologies of surveillance colonize symbolic space, the anonymous performance of (posting) contests that reterritorialization and imagines another moment: a time and place outside the state’s electronic eye. This working collective is watching the watcher and providing a much-needed counter-publicity to the state’s power. In this work we also glimpse an avant-gardist sexual performance, which is to say a performance that enacts a critique of sexual normativities allowing us to bear witness to a new formation, a future in the present. (*Cruising* 61)

Calder Harben

Calder Harben's works are particularly evocative of a queer utopia; from its search for queer communities in isolated places around the globe to its suggestion of a sexual fantasy involving the self, Harben rejects not only a heteronormative view of the world, but one which holds that the individual cannot occupy multiple positions in a physical space. By modeling the skin-objects after their own body, and describing an imagined world wherein one might watch oneself interacting with another person, Harben imagines an impossible future that is not just unmistakably queer, but fundamentally non-binary in a way that gets to the heart of the project of disidentification.

Calder Harben's work, similarly to Espezel's, promises a level of knowing that can only be accessed through touching the work, but because of its uncanny resemblance to real skin, it simultaneously repulses; the viewer can be left with a satisfying understanding of the work which exists in the space between the desire and aversion to it. Harben's work exploits shame as a particularly affective tool; Sedgwick describes shame as an authenticating emotion, one that drives the performative urge at the same time as it denies it and therefore functions to situate identity.

In Harben's skin-pieces, on the other hand, the soft, slightly uncanny inanimate objects play the role of the aloof lover; they do not beg to be touched; it is the audience who desires to touch them, or alternately, are driven away. Coolly unaffected, the objects inhabit comfortably the role of master while the audience becomes Other, strongly affected by their reaction to the work.

In the arctic flag project, Harben invited queer people to send flags representing their specific communities to them to be flown on a ship traveling the arctic circle. Flags included in the project ranged from the ecosexual pride flag, and the Saskatchewan gay pride flag to the flag for ladies who prefer to stay home and cuddle the cats. Simultaneously staking out territory for underrepresented people and searching for potential kin, this quiet project, as Harben's other work, existed as the performance of the artist's longing and (by proxy) the longing of others.

Most of the works in my curatorial project do not clearly reside in one or another of the four categories of performance I am discussing, nor should they. Are Calder Harben's skin objects opportunities for audience transgressions, or stand-ins for the artist's body? Each of the works in the exhibition contains a physical element that marks it as not "pure" performance, not categorically one thing or another. I am not presenting a list of possible options that an artist may select from in making performance that resists the dominant narrative. Rather, I am interested in framing new ways of thinking about performance art and I am discussing what I see as the four ways I have identified that work which engages in modes of resistance can be read. The artwork in this exhibition should not be considered perfect examples of my theoretical ideals; they should be read as voices in the conversation about whether the theoretical model I am positing is viable.

Rachel Herrick

Rachel Herrick's Museum for Obeast Conservation Studies (MOCS) would quite literally be a faux-anthropological study of obese people, were it not for the fact that she recasts them/her (us) as not-human, as less-than-human, as, literally, beasts. Thus, her work is faux-zoological (studying those obeasts who still exist yet are endangered), faux-palaeontological (studying the extinct ancestors of the obeasts), and faux-cryptozoological (attempting to trace the history of creatures who many believe do not actually exist). Through her complex series of strategies designed to both disarm/charm the viewer and implicate them in the sociological structures which created the problem she seeks to expose, Herrick's work straddles the line between complicity and antagonism (as an artistic strategy, following Bishop). Using Marcus' strategy of complicity (what I call 'connivance' in order to distinguish it from Bishop's use of the word), casting the viewer as a sympathetic "other," she creates an uncanny space where belief in the creature of the Obeast, whose characteristics of laziness, gluttony and stupidity mirror the dominant narrative of fat people as lazy, gluttonous and unintelligent, forces the audience to both reaffirm that belief system and simultaneously resist their role in maintaining these systems. Rather than saying "I resist this untenable narrative, and attempt to change it" as a fat artist might be expected to, but cannot because her fat body renders her unable to communicate, she sets up an opportunity for the audience to resist, and become the agents of change.

In her introduction to *Obeast: A Broader View*, Herrick asserts that "pleasantness is a preference people teach each other and ultimately use to establish and maintain social prestige hierarchies." (Herrick ix) She goes on to describe how fat, as a substance and physical attribute which in its essence is free from moral attributes, has been used to mark, in different time periods and different cultures, a range of social classes and statuses from the highest to the lowest, the most advanced to the most "backwards," from the most beautiful to the ugliest. Today's dominant narrative casts fat as not only lesser, but morally bankrupt, classifying "obesity" as not just a physical trait but a disease brought on by its victim, one which destroys the worth of its victim and makes it deserving of abuse and systematic oppression by the culture at large.

Jenny Hagel notes in *Obeast* that:

"In our health-obsessed culture, we're encouraged to judge people who aren't on board. Strangers confidently order smokers to put out their cigarettes. Women admonish new mothers for not breastfeeding. Street-philanthropists give money to homeless people while lecturing them not to spend it on alcohol. And while there are, in fact, behaviors that are linked to poorer health, only obesity causes us to place people into an entirely different, lesser category. We see a smoker as a person who smokes. We see an obese person as less than human." (Herrick 44)

Jennifer Denbow further problematizes this concept in her essay, noting that via what Haraway terms a "logic of Discovery," the scientist is the active agent/objective and the object of study is passive; therefore, the scientist (or person who is studying something) who embodies any of the characteristics of that which s/he is studying cannot be objective; they are incapable of scientific distance and logic. (Herrick 50) Because of this, any work done by fat people about fatness is treated with suspicion, and discounted wholesale. Herrick's work puts this whole system on display, making transparent science's subjective position in furthering the dominant discourse.

The history of the museum as the site for the entrenchment of a colonialist narrative is well-documented; MOCS literally "mocks the museum to expose both its colonialist discourse and its perpetration of the dominant gaze. At the same time, MOCS mocks the stereotype of the animalistic, lazy, dumb, and uncritical fat person." (Herrick 8) Herrick describes, as I and other fat artists have, that she came to an understanding of the need to create work that addresses the dominant narrative of fatness not through an educational enlightenment or a pedagogic learning of the problem, but through her own embodiment being an impediment to making work about anything *other than* fatness. Even more broadly, she talks about an inability to develop an identity for herself outside the narrow range of characteristics that are culturally ascribed to the fat person. Instead of resisting, as many choose to do, Herrick said "Ok, fine. I'll be fat just the way the world thinks I am. I'll live the stereotype." And thus, the Obeast was born.

Herrick's body is the model for all of the Obeasts in her work, making her work very pointedly; she's not just

talking about fat people theoretically, or fat people in general. She's talking about herself. She is creating mute figures which are just as incapable of using their voice as fat people are. That her Obeasts are jarring is in part because of their uncanny nature as replicas of Herrick's own body, but also in great part because they are NOT simply replicas or mannequins, they are *dead* Obeasts. In recreating the museum diorama, Herrick is forcing us to consider the fat person as an object suitable for shooting, stuffing, mounting, and putting on display for discussion about our grotesque nature.

In the case of objects which exist as stand-ins for the artist's body, the question of whether performance can resist reproduction depends greatly on the kind of stand-in. Phelan insists that objects *can* act as the Self that casts the audience as Other, through an understanding of performance such as I am undertaking. In Rachel Herrick's *Museum for Obeast Conservation Studies*, it seems to me, the artist is less interested in resisting and more interesting in harnessing complicity to deconstruct it from within. Her project of mimicking the museum depends entirely on a wholesale replication of those modes of reproduction that have been shown to be extremely colonial in their method and ideology. It is in the recasting of the audience as performers within the space that they become Other, and are forced to confront their belief systems from a new angle.

Herrick concludes: "If viewers are baffled by my implication that fat people exist outside and at odds with human culture, I hope that this bafflement persists outside the gallery space and into regular life." (Herrick 83) By harnessing complicity in the creation of a completely convincing unfathomable world within our own world, Herrick makes us aware of the amazing ability of our minds to believe just about anything, and goes one step further, in making us understand that in fact we *do* believe these untrue things.

Michelle Lacombe

Lacombe is interested in a return to the body; her work focuses on not just the body in performance, but on *her* body in particular. In our initial conversations about her potential participation in this project, Lacombe expressed surprise that I would consider her work suitable for examination in relationship to the body's absence within the performative space. Perhaps her surprise uncovered what I think might be the biggest paradox of this exhibition; that of examining work in which the body is absent which also engages in discourse about the body. Or, rather, work which explicitly uses the body's absence as a way of making the body that much more visible.

Through the intrinsic concept of loss, Phelan explains performance art's "fundamental bond" with ritual, (*Unmarked* 152) especially in performance that uses physical pain, via its evocation of the (symbolic) death of the performer, which elicits a promise to remember that which is lost.

Michelle Lacombe's work is literally ritualistic, in its repetition of action, marking of the body, observance of lunar cycles, reference to blood. In her work for *The Missing Body*, not only is the body absent, but the ritual is denied us, leaving only a trace of the action and the body in one. If performance is a call to witness the death of the performer, Lacombe's work, which is fundamentally *about* the body, frustrates the viewer's expectations; the performer is dead. They have arrived too late, missed their cue; their role is redundant. Thus Lacombe's work exists within this new mode of the unmarked; it exists to fulfill itself, performs in our absence, and leaves a representation of the body that is not a reproduction; it creates a fully realized Self with no Other.

Are Michelle Lacombe's pools of saltwater stand-ins for her body, or traces of a performance for which there was no witness? From the salty traces that form Michelle Lacombe's *Of All the Watery Bodies, I've Only Known My Own*, a performance has apparently happened, and all that remains is the stain on the floor. This stain, (which in the contemporary performance world might be called 'residue' or 'ephemera') is the trace of the performance that is left behind as evidence to future audiences; those who were not witness to the action. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz claims that queer gestures are "vast storehouses of... history and futurity" (81) and that those gestures' ephemera are a crucial part of the work. Muñoz was referring to the trace left behind in the memory of those who witnessed the live performance of those meaningful gestures, but I would suggest that the trace of those gestures is meaningful and impactful even for those who did not directly witness their performance. Especially if we agree that the primary role of the visual in our creation of knowledge is in upholding the dominant narrative, there are other ways of experiencing the knowledge embodied by physical gesture that do not rely on visual proof of the action. Lacombe's *Watery Bodies* are proof that those gestures are still knowable.

All the work in the series of which *Watery Bodies* is a part focuses on blood, water, tides, and lunar cycles. It references well-worn imagery of the fertile (cis-gendered) female body, and is very much about the artist's relationship to her own corporeality. The manifestation of the work in terms of the audience's interface with it, however, is less clearly corporeally-centered. One of the significant recurring gestures made in the creation of this work is the monthly tattooing, with water instead of ink, of horizontal lines around each leg at the level to which her blood, pooled in her hollow body, would reach. This action is performed privately with her tattooist, making it a performance that triply removes the body: first, the tattooist is the primary actor in the work while Lacombe is the acted-upon. Second, the performance happens in the absence of an audience. Third, though the artist has a photograph taken on the newly re-inscribed bloodline after every fresh application, she does not consider this to be the method by which the work will circulate as an artwork, rather imagining it presented as "an oral presentation, a text, a visual work, etc." (Lacombe artist statement, 2013). Other pieces of this project – photographs of the moon taken monthly by the artist – and the work in this exhibition – the volume of her blood in saltwater allowed to dry on the floor of the gallery – actively remove the artist's body from the work while reaffirming it as the subject of the art. Even in performance that relies on her retelling of the story of the work's creation (oral presentation/lecture) where her body is obviously present in the performance space, Lacombe denies her (current, lecturing) body's presence as the locus of the work, saying, in essence, "I have to tell you about this performance in words because I can't show it to you with my body; the work is not here." In this way Lacombe iterates another of the work's themes – that of "overlapping

cycles of movement towards erasure.” (Lacombe, 2013) Just as the tide erodes the land in waves and the tattoo erodes the flesh while the body heals and scars, the body’s presence is situated, erased, re-situated, and erased through the performance, its invisibility, its retelling, and the denial of its presence.

Naima Lowe

In *Richard Simmons 'Til You Die*, Naima Lowe attempts to (symbolically) kill the body hatred that led to her being in possession of Simmons' *Disco Sweat* exercise video by (literally) killing the tape by playing it over and over until it dies. Asking volunteers and viewers to participate in this methodical destruction through this performance invites them in to her experience; to relive the exhausting history of body dissatisfaction and trying endlessly to change one's body. By removing herself from the work, Lowe invites others to perform it, not only sharing in the physical labour but the emotional burden of cultural body oppression. This work harnesses the potential of radical negativity (as discussed by queer theorists such as Muñoz, Sedgwick and Phelan) to create new politics, new connections, and new identities. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, J. Jack Halberstam talks about how absence can lead to a certain kind of knowledge, how loss can be queer, forgetting can be a tactic used to resist the dominant narrative, and denial of the self/persona can be a revolutionary act. Referencing moments in history where the colonial power has used the tool of forgetting to dominate occupied cultures (via forced relocations, removal of children from their families and cultures, etc.), Halberstam suggests that artists can harness similar tactics to forget the narrative that has been inscribed upon them and create a new one. Losing can be used in a similar way, exploiting witlessness, stupidity and forgetfulness that may be ascribed to oneself or one's culture in order to ignore and push back against those who would underestimate them. Destroying *Disco Sweat* is a ritualistic forgetting of Lowe's body history, and a rewriting of that history of one of love and strength.

Lowe's work *Thirty-nine (39) Questions for White People* not only resists visibility, but it actively resists the neoliberal longing to feel better and forget; for race issues to go away. While Phelan would describe language as being in the realm of the reproductive, the visible, the marked, in *The Feeling of Kinship*, David Eng calls for a reconsidering of the rift between affect and language, further to his project to reunite affect and history. Affect, in other words, need not be oppositional to language; they can be supplemental. *Thirty-nine (39) Questions for White People*, based entirely in language, also exists in the realm of the performative and not, I would argue, the reproductive. I suggest that the main difference between Eng's interest in resisting visibility but using language and Phelan's interest in keeping language out of the project of resisting visibility is that Phelan's work, based in psychoanalytic theory, constructs Self and Other in a way which privileges gender as the binary on which her ideas of "difference" are based. Eng's work, on the other hand, is based in critical race studies and literature; he recognizes that racialized histories are constructed, contested, multiple, non-binary, not clearly demarcated, and that language is a conduit for ideas and memories and stories which are valuable for reconstructing/maintaining/distinguishing personal and group identity while resisting visibility.

Eng does recognize a need to revisit history, but describes historical revisionism and political reparation as futile; that attempts to construct a picture of "the way it *really was*" (192) are not possible. Instead, he suggests that "psychic reparation" (192), through affect, can create connections to the past that keep them anchored to the present and therefore tangible and real. Lowe's work can be read as an attempt at psychic reparation of this nature; of using a series of questions directed at white people to harness the power of affect in reconsidering histories and "realities."

In *39 Questions for White People*, the audience performs the work through not just reading the questions, but by *considering* them. They are performing a transgression of the politeness of the presentation space, and a transgression of the expectation that whiteness—that the dominant narrative—not be challenged. Lowe describes *Thirty-nine (39) Questions for White People* as "an exercise in turning the emotional labor of racism into tangible physical labor." (Naima Lowe, project description, 2013) The creation of the book was itself a performance; the performance of creating an object from a history of pain. Having done the doubly hard work of experiencing the racism and creating the labour-intensive object, the presentation of the work creates an opportunity for the audience to perform the work by trying to answer the questions, and confronting the implications those answers make.

In *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan noted Adrian Piper's demonstration that "part of the meaning of race resides in the perpetual choice to acknowledge or ignore its often invisible markings." (7) Lowe renders that choice

(literally) legible through her book of questions, and in presenting it as a book, resists her own retraumatization.

Cheli Nighthtraveller

When I started working as Programme Coordinator at AKA Gallery in Saskatoon in 2000, the gallery was fully scheduled until early 2004, providing me with plenty of work to do but little creative input. One of the first things I did was to open up a gallery in our tiny bar fridge. I called it the Frost Free Gallery, and I set out to pair show in the main gallery with shows in the fridge as a way of stimulating dialogue about the art, and about the nature of the gallery—in particular the miniature/provisional gallery spaces that seemed to be popping up everywhere— and of keeping creatively engaged in my job. I also instituted and curated a year-round performance art series which ran for the 8 years I was employed there and while that would probably be interesting to talk about in the context of this paper, that's a story for another time. The Frost Free Gallery ran for 4 years, (until we left our old home and moved into a space where the fridge would no longer be accessible to the public,) and during that time I asked each of the participating artists to write a text about their work, reflecting on the nature of the gallery.

I selected work for the Frost Free which seemed to have a natural affinity for the refrigerator-cum-gallery – an exhibition about genetic engineering in foods by Tracy Susheski, a piece by Carolyn Meili about polar bears, which inhabited the freezer compartment, art featuring meat, leftover cookies and cake, boxes of chocolates, magnetic fridge poetry, and even beer (which the public was invited to consume). Armed Invasion Begins in the Kitchen, a show by Aaron Sennitt, was a stack of postcards in the fridge upon which was inscribed the Portuguese adage after which the exhibition was named. Based on the concept that the home and the kitchen are sites of power, the show aimed to “arm” our audience with the nourishment of the art from the fridge, asking them to take the cards away and disperse them into the world. I found the most successful and the most exciting Frost Free projects to be those that actively engaged not only the work in the main gallery, the notion of the gallery itself, and the notion of the refrigerator, but dynamically activated the fridge, such that opening it up, as an audience member, became a performance. Whether drinking a beer, taking a postcard, or simply considering the stale food products in the fridge provided the audience a way of engaging with the art which did not ask of them anything more or less than any other interaction with a gallery or refrigerator anywhere else (you enter the gallery, you consider the contents, you take what you want/need) and yet almost all of these exhibitions made the audience into performers of their work through their embodied experience/relationship to the work.

One of the first artists I showed in the Frost Free Gallery was Cheli Nighthtraveller, who wanted very explicitly to do a performance art project in the fridge. I could not fathom what she intended to do, though I imagined that it involved trying to squeeze into a very tiny space. When the day of the installation arrived, I saw that Nighthtraveller had created surrogates for her performance art mentors and idols; they were names inscribed on mothballs, floating in a giant pickle jar filled with a vinegar/water/baking soda solution (if I remember my elementary-school science correctly) so that they gently floated up to the top of the jar and down, over and over again, performing a choreographed dance all day for the audience of paper cutout dolls which inhabited the other shelves of the fridge. This was the first time I'd encountered an artwork described by the artist as a performance, but in which there was no live body present, certainly not the artist's own! Though it spent a long time germinating deep in my subconscious mind before I formulated any ideas about the nature of this kind of work, the text Nighthtraveller wrote to accompany the work has informed my thinking about performance in the absence of the artist's body as a meaningful strategy towards myriad worthwhile goals.

The accompanying her show, *Namedropping*, reads:

“I am taking this opportunity to raise questions about the role of the gallery. I have more questions than answers. However, I am approaching this conundrum from my own gallery EXPERIENCES.

Sometimes it seems the four white walls of a gallery are restrictive and inhibiting to forming personal relationships (that which I value most about a gallery experience), but PERHAPS if we confront the RESTRICTIONS, we can loosen up and truly inhabit the gallery.

The people who inhabit the gallery are my Art Stars, especially the ones who make it all happen, not just the artists.

HOW DOES A PERFORMANCE ARTIST TAKE UP SPACE?

Can a space be a gallery if it is uninhabitable?

Is there room in a gallery for more than one “Art Star”?

Should a performance continue if there is “no one” present to witness it?

HOW DO YOU DECIDE THE VALUE OF AN ART EXPERIENCE?

IS THERE A PLACE FOR YOU IN THE FROST FREE GALLERY?”

Since that work, Nighthtraveller has continued to address the concept of performance through work from which the body is absent, while for nearly a decade simultaneously performing works in which her body was **extremely** present. Known for her powerfully affective work, Nighthtraveller makes art that recreates moments from her life – her mother’s smile, the death of a childhood pet rabbit – and which demonstrate her struggle to find her place in the world. Perhaps that is what triggered her strong impulse to leave her physical body out of the performance, to remove it from the time and space of the performative act; that removing her body from her performance functions to protect her mental and physical health, and to avoid having her traumas revisited upon her.

In Nighthtraveller’s more recent performances, those in which the body is notably absent, she toys with the ideas of subject/object and animate/inanimate. The animate/inanimate dichotomy, for Nighthtraveller, emerges in part from her First Nations heritage, but also her readings of the philosophy of resistentialism, founded in 1948 by Paul Jennings, who claimed “*Les choses sont contre nous*,” “Things are against us.” Russell Baker, following Jennings, later created three categories of objects: “those that don’t work, those that break down and those that get lost.” (TEXTiles, 2009) Based on the notion that all objects “carry malicious intent and resist the will of mankind,” (TEXTiles, 2009) as Nighthtraveller puts it, resistentialism allows her to transfer the performative impulse into objects which become the actors within her artwork; not as in kinetic objects which move and therefore embody the action of the art, but objects which in fact contain a consciousness and a will to perform. Nighthtraveller expects the gallery, the curator and the public to treat these conscious objects as such. For her participation in TEXTiles, curated by David Garneau for the Art Gallery of Regina in 2009, Nighthtraveller sent Xistchian, a stuffed toy squirrel she fashioned out of a sock, with explicit instructions for his care and feeding which she expected to receive documentation of as proof that he was being properly tended to. While she claims space as the author of the work, she simultaneously makes room for the performing object-subject to claim its own agency as the performer. In so doing, Nighthtraveller is saying ‘my body may not be present, but I still claim the territories of performance. I want my presence to be acknowledged; I demand to be seen.’

Nighthtraveller quite literally demands to be seen with her project for *The Missing Body*. Her wooden Indian, a cigar-store Indian caricature cobbled together from a mess of cultural symbols and stereotypes, is actually a hollow prop designed to carry the performer into spaces from which a First Nations presence is palpably absent, manifesting both as an exaggerated presence and an acknowledgement of its absence. Noting how the climate of a conversation changes once a First Nations person makes their presence known (often because the conversation impacts or is about First Nations people and yet their voice has been absent thus far), Nighthtraveller decided to provide the service of an Indian-for-hire; someone who will provide a visible presence for First Nations people at an event and yet remain (thankfully, stoically, appropriately) silent, while bearing witness to the conversation.

Performance in the absence of the artist’s body, considered apart from the artist’s body entirely, allows the artist to talk about and do things that performance, singularly, can do, while shedding those markings of the explicit body and the ghosts that inhabit them.

Performance that involves the audience activates, potentially, both an explicit and an implicit body. In Cheli Nighthtraveller’s work for *The Missing Body*, her body is, essentially, both present and absent simultaneously.

Communication between the artist and the audience is essential to the work, but that interaction exists, even through the absence of interaction, as an implied understanding that the artist is present even if she is not known for certain to be. Cheli Nighthtraveller's work in this regard is slippery; her body is certainly lost, but as the strategy she employs relies on the viewer's belief that the body is present, the presence of the Indian/box itself is designed to make audiences uncomfortably aware of her presence as witness to their performance of dominance.

Adding several complex layers to the work is the fact that at any given appearance, Nighthtraveller may or may not be inside the work; either because one of her collaborative assistants is inside instead, or because no one is. In Marcus' terms, Nighthtraveller's strategy employs the use of anthropological complicity (what I call "connivance") as the outsider who recognizes themselves as the traditional object of study and therefore is *particularly* sensitive to the outside, and also perhaps relatively uninterested, (because of that history of being subject to unethical anthropological treatment) in being overly sensitive to those who it has turned the gaze back upon. In this way, Cheli is a metaphorical correlative for the conundrum of Schroedinger's cat; she is simultaneously both in the box and not in the box. The fact that she is *sometimes* in the box and *sometimes not* is her way of not just resisting that dominance but asserting her own.

Nighthtraveller's work has continued to address the notion of the animate/inanimate in First Nations culture through her pointed use of the animated object/animal. Having "animated" the rabbit and the squirrel in past performances (through the use of costume, storytelling, anthropomorphization of both toys and live animals,) Nighthtraveller's relationships with her subject-objects (she converses with them, has emotional connections to and with them, and respects their opinions about her/their work) provide a worthwhile model of study on the nature of "live" when it comes to live performance. Must "live" mean breathing, blood-pumping, brain activity, or can it simply mean in the here and now? If standard definitions of performance art agree that performance art involves the presence of a body in space over time, and we having taken pains NOT to define what a body is lest we start to exclude those whose bodies are unfamiliar to us in their supposed shortcomings (missing limbs, for example) or artificial additions (prosthetic or cyborg attachments), or the space they inhabit, we must agree that the only person who can define what the body is in any given performance is the artist. I can imagine a none-too-fanciful future in which people might inhabit the world via robotic surrogates, for safety or comfort or due to illness. And what of virtual performance? Second Life has already shown us that what a "body" is, relative to the word "live" is extremely flexible. So if the artist claims that an object has a consciousness, that she has communicated with it, and that it has agreed to perform on her behalf, (and, whether this is relevant or not, let's say that the artist believes all this too), is there anyone who could say otherwise?

Mami Takahashi

In her work which “explores the boundaries between public and private self” (Takahashi project description, 2013), Mami Takahashi considers how the body performs at all times, (even when we would rather it didn’t) and that it performs texts for the public that we might prefer to keep confidential. *Hiding/Observing* offers the audience a twice-removed body – the body is hidden in the performance, and the performance is presented to us only through documentation – not dissimilarly to Lacombe’s work, though to different ends: Takahashi wants her body’s invisibility to be rendered hyper-visible. Her comic attempts at hiding are presented as dramatic failures; her feet sticking out from underneath a foil invisibility pod make her not only quite visible, but mark her as having botched the performance of a simple act of going unnoticed. The second half of the gesture of the performance, *Observing*, implies both a desire to fit in and a suspicion of the society from which she hides – observing in order to learn and perhaps become more like, or perhaps as a type of undercover reconnaissance, an uneasy mistrust of her surroundings.

Takahashi’s farcical visibility in her *Hiding/Observing* project still allows her to avoid becoming owned by the spectatorial gaze. She, however, can see through the non-mirrored side of her protective mylar shell; her gaze may not be returned, but while her body is lost to the watcher, she makes of them the watched.

The photographs in *Hiding/Observing* are documents of performances about resistance to visibility, partly as a way to defy surveillance by the dominant culture and partly as a way to examine that culture unobserved. Her work points out the strategic benefits of resisting visibility in providing a vantage point from which one might be the watcher instead of the watched. Her images embody two stereotypes of the Asian Other that she may have confronted during her immersion in American culture, the shy and the spy, but they do so by declining to picture her. By refusing visibility via a gesture that represents disparate affective positions, Takahashi confuses expectations and declines any sort of construction of her identity by the viewer. This kind of image, as Eng describes it, is “less representational than emotional, and marked by the failure of language; this image is dissociated from the traditional protocols of signification and accompanied by an excruciating affective intensity that alludes, while simultaneously demanding, symbolic inscription.” (168)

Considering herself between cultures – no longer in Japan, not yet American – Takahashi’s performances render her a ghost. Neither “here” nor “there,” in fact, denying the existence of a “here” and a “there,” the artist is half-visible, half-invisible; neither as present as she would like at times to be (in being understood, in taking up space as an invisible “other”), nor as absent as she would like to be able to be when she so desires (as one who sticks out because they are different). This work highlights the frustrating duality of the “other,” then; being simultaneously supervisible and invisible, whose actions and embodiment are scrutinized by the dominant culture and yet whose experience is not recognized, or worse, denied.

Visibility, Eng suggests, is one strategy among many; a strategy that should not be discarded. Visibility can be used to depict a version of the present, as long as it is used in a way that resists the dominant narrative; any attempt to correct history will simply be absorbed into this narrative. He suggests that the realm of the affective is more impactful than that of the visible, and that the best attempts to draw attention to the invisible are not in making them visible but in replicating their invisibility. (180-183) Nighthtraveller, Lowe, Takahashi and Guerrero all make the invisibility they are addressing in their work extremely evident—not visible—but affectively *known*.