

Pictures in an Exhibition- Video Synopsis

(Note: *Pictures in an Exhibition* is a six-channel video installation and formed my MFA thesis exhibition at the University of Waterloo. It was shown at the University of Waterloo Art Gallery in April 2013. A full version of the support document for the work can be found under the "writings" tab on my website headings bar.)

Can the female feel at home in nature, myth and on screen, realms where she is so often laid to rest? *Pictures in an Exhibition* is a pastiche that lays bare popular culture and art historical tropes in which ambiguous signifiers have become lost in a chain of referents. An installation of videos documents durational performances—filmed, edited and performed by the artist unaccompanied—that are humorous, satirical, aesthetic, historical, philosophical and psychological. Making simultaneous reference to art history, mass media, literature and mythology, *Pictures in an Exhibition* exposes the conflicted condition of a postfeminist 'self' striving to arrive at an exhibition of subjectivity.

red carpet (red stripe painting; walking the line) (edited selection) 20 min, *digital video*, 2013

(Note: the original work is comprised of twenty-two durational scenes with the figure walking the length of the carpet in each setting; the figure fills the frame at the start of each scene and walks into a fade-out in the distance.)

"Red carpet" is an extended performance-for-video work filmed by the artist unaccompanied over the course of nine months. It follows a glamorous female figure in a black glittering gown, teetering down a seemingly endless red carpet—a carpet that cuts its way through an ever-changing landscape. Humorously unfettered by the obstacles in her way, we witness the heroine tripping over uneven surfaces, navigating through trees and dense grasses, plunging through a river crossing, maintaining equilibrium on a carpeted log, baring skin bitten by snow and ice, careening down a deep snowy slope, mounting sand dunes and finally disappearing into the waves all while wearing a pair of black, three-inch heels.

Her back always facing the viewer, our heroine refuses personal identification and instead exemplifies type. The viewer is able to follow multiple lines of interpretations in "red carpet". In ancient mythology the red carpet was seen as a godly luxury separating the mortal, lowly earth from the tread of the gods. Today we have become so accustomed to seeing celebrities walking the red carpet at award shows and premieres that the custom does not feel odd or contrived; the dangerous import of 'mortals acting as gods' has been lost. Expectation is subverted in "red carpet" where an unidentified woman is walking away from, rather than presenting herself to the viewer.

It is my hope that "red carpet" will continue a dialogue about the representation of the female subject. Women are caught in a sticky web of mythology that defines their every move. They are rarely allowed to author their own fate in cinematic space, even today. "Red carpet" questions but also pays homage to our expectations of the tropes and representations of woman and her relationship to nature, her own image and the big screen.

Fragonard's swing (Miss La La; hung out to dry), (excerpt) 5min 31sec, digital video loop, 2012

(Note: the original video is a continuous loop of the speeding-up, slowing-down and coming to rest again of the hanging figure. The looping of the video is evident in the reversal of falling leaves part way through the loop.)

In "Fragonard's swing" a female figure hangs upside-down off a trapeze from the nooks of her knees. Her white dress has fallen inside-out and is hanging down over the top half of her body, covering her head. Bright white underpants, bare legs and black rubber boots are fully exposed. With the figure seemingly lifeless, the trapeze appears to be moving on its own accord: it picks up velocity and the figure does a series of slow turning pirouettes before coming to rest again.

"Fragonard's swing" makes reference to several well-known paintings that feature a woman on a swing or trapeze: Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *Happy hazards of the swing*, Edgar Degas's *Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando* and Édouard Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (the trapeze artist's legs are barely visible in the top left-hand corner of Manet's painting). All of these paintings feature a highly symbolic and sexualized female figure performing for a male gaze. The romantic image of youthful sexuality played out on a swing becomes warped in "Fragonard's swing" by a more contemporary association: an ominous murder of a young woman in the woods so familiar in prime time television crime series. "Fragonard's swing" is a derisory play on the stereotype of the show girl. The woman on the trapeze only partially offers herself up to be viewed: she is an inverted and a somewhat unnerving spectacle.

Leda and the Swan (pool toy; plastic pornography), (edited selection) 10 min, digital video, 2013

(Note: the original version is comprised of six main scenes and a sequence of two repeating scenes set before the final two scenes. Some of the scenes have been omitted or have been cut down significantly in the demo.)

In "Leda and the Swan" Leda is seen floating languidly through a sequence of idyllic river scenes on a large inflatable plastic pool swan. We are lulled by the gentle gliding of our heroine through the water on her steed as she drifts by in a variety of positions. Single frames flash in repeated sequence onto the screen separating the scenes: the suggestive flutter of orgasm. The climax of action is ironically represented in momentary still images set between lengthy scenes of virtual inaction.

Historically, the myth of Leda and the swan (Zeus in disguise) was an opportunity for artists to represent the female figure in 'metaphoric' copulation with a 'long necked' swan—seen as less suggestive and troubling than a man/woman coupling. In this version, the dead-pan, matter-of-factness of the copulation of a woman with gigantic plastic swan points to an often ridiculous and obsessive love affair with femininity that is plasticized and pornographic. In the final scene of "Leda and the Swan", Leda and the swan deflate until they are flaccid, collapsed into each other and almost fully submerged in the water. Two large white eggs float away from the pair in the river's current and the loop begins again.

looking glass(es) (lost; Stella), (edited selection) 2 versions: 12min 40sec and 7min, *digital video loop*, 2013

(Note: in the original version each scene and subsequent inset video sequence completes a full cycle of action (no cuts visible) before fragmenting into more inset parts. In the shorter version (7 min) of the original, the returning of the inset videos to the single frame video resolves more quickly than in the longer version.)

The heroine in “looking glass(es)” is entrapped in her wooded theatre. She dashes manically from side to side visibly carving out a clearing or stage. In the ever-so-brief glimpse of our subject’s face the viewer’s expectation is sabotaged. Our heroine is wearing glasses; she has stolen the gaze. Yet in a humorous twist, we see that eyes have been painted onto the lenses and are literally blinding our subject. “Looking glass(es)” questions agency of looking and seeing.

As the action continues, the lowering of the woman’s hand-held mirror initiates a moment of magic as the scene fragments and an inverse video appears within the first. This fragmentation continues until there are five inset videos running concurrently but out of synch. This effect implies a broken mirror or Alice’s rabbit hole, but it also references the painter Frank Stella’s *Tomlinson Court Park*. Stella’s paintings challenged illusionism and the materiality of the painted space. In a similar way “looking glass(es)” deconstructs time and space and plays with our expectations of tropes and signifiers. This moves the work out of theatrical mimesis and acknowledges the image as social and mythological construct.

Sisyphus yogi (Renaissance woman, somersault), (edited selection) 3min 20sec, *digital video loop*, 2012

(Note: in the original version the action of the scene is not cut except for the zoom-in that occurs part way through the climb and the zoom-out that occurs during the fall.)

A play on the predictable predicament of Sisyphus, “Sisyphus yogi” follows a female figure in a tight black dress and high heels attempting repeatedly to push a yoga ball up scree. In a dramatic backlit climax, just before mounting the summit, the woman slips and falls face-first into the incline. The yoga ball mockingly hits her head and bounces over her body back down the hill. The figure reluctantly pulls herself back to her feet and somersaults down the slope in hot pursuit. The loop begins again. “Sisyphus yogi” takes a close look at the mania of the ‘made’ contemporary woman. Caught in an intensive regimen of yoga and Pilates in the quest for spiritual perfection, life-balance, and tight buns our heroine can never achieve the self and culturally imposed idealism she places on her image making.

white on white (marrying the wind; runaway bride), (excerpt) 9min, *digital video loop*, 2013

(Note: in the original version the duration of time between the appearance of the figure is extended and varies significantly—with the figure appearing at different times and from different directions (and sometimes repeating the same pass)—with each crossing.)

In “white on white” we encounter a seemingly blank screen. Implied in the video capture of a snow storm—a ‘white out’—is the blank canvas and reference to minimalist transcendental void. This is emotionally heightened by the unease of ‘white-noise’ and the mortality implicit in ‘white-light’. The scene is disrupted by another symbol of purity: the bride. Intermittently she is seen sprinting through the drifting snow in a flowing white wedding gown, veil, and dainty open-toed shoes. The euphoria of the bride’s flight is coupled with the obvious physical pain of the bride’s plight. This reveals an ambiguous space—a space between beauty and terror—that entraps the symbolically owned subject.