

ladies at court, and on through Picasso's and de Kooning's painted women, the female image has a vast and dense history. As recently evidenced, women artists have covered long distances in separating the historic picture from its flesh and blood experience, utilizing their own bodies as visual, poetic, and conceptual fodder for work that examines both female identity and the lived experience of women. It might be just this powerful

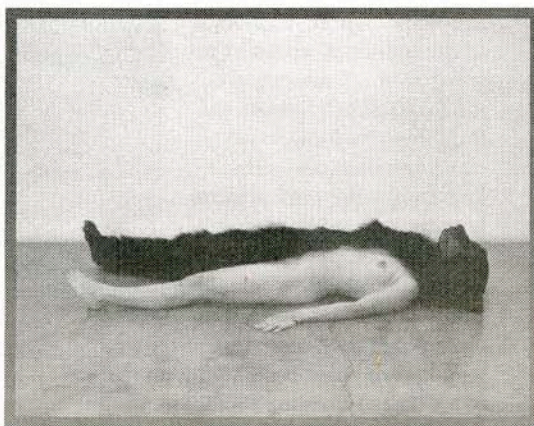


legacy that made a show like *Body Double* challenging at this point in time: How does an artist distinguish herself within a history still being written?

Within this weighted context, the disproportionate

amount of references to death, disfigurement and mutilation, both literal and abstract, in *Body Double* should not have seemed surprising, and yet they did. But what at first appeared as a thinly veiled, if unconscious, call for help from women everywhere soon morphed into a more analytical, and definitively less alarming, conjecture about the use of masquerade and appropriation in art. Many of the works included, such as Wendy Red Star's four photographs of herself as a Native American princess sitting in front of campy, calendar backgrounds of the four seasons, or Kara Hearn's video reenacting dying scenes from popular movies with a DIY aesthetic (complete with red pom-pom blood) exude a cool, deliberate distance. This emphasis of idea and appropriation over a more individualistic processing of actual experience opens a dialogue about the use of recycled imagery, in this case to comment on the experience of being in a body—a woman's body—and the fine line between which art is able to separate from its

Above: Mathilde ter Heijne, still from *Mathilde, Mathilde*, 2000, single channel DVD; below: Carlee Fernandez, *Bear Head, Arm and Leg Study I*, 2004, chromogenic print, 32" x 40", at Luckman Gallery, California State University, Los



source material to become something new. Three photographs from Caitlin Atkinson's series, imaginatively titled by chapters as if from a fictional book, are based on life experiences (of failure or disappointment) rather than ideas about the perception or depiction of female identity. The images, while beautiful, so strongly refer to cinema and photography that their relationship to experience is hidden; the gorgeous persimmon tree that hovers above the artist's prone body in *Chapter 11, December 2003*, or the foggy field in *Chapter 14, August 2005* could be film stills from *Wuthering Heights*—or another more recent remake of a classic, begging the question of how much experience, even that of art-making, is influenced by its own history and that of popular culture, versus being aware of and unpacking it. Liz Cohen takes on the question with humor and irony, posing her bikini-clad body across the hoods of cars. This slick, facile exterior is intriguingly scratched on learning that Cohen took it upon herself to rebuild the muscle cars she poses with, recasting princesses as pinups and Barbie as a mechanic, effectively transforming both stereotypes.

Those works that leap beyond a reconstruction or commentary—whether on art, female identity, or mediated experience—to embody a distinctive perspective or narrative surrounding these ideas resonate most powerfully. Carlee Fernandez's photographs of her nude body, half-covered in a bear costume, reflect influences of both surrealism and feminism, but also provide an elusive and refreshing take on the female nude. Fernandez's straightforward use of costume and artifice provides ample space for mystery and contemplation. Equally strong is Mathilde ter Heijne's video work, *Mathilde, Mathilde* (2000), in which the artist tosses a doll of herself over the side of a bridge into the steely, gray waters of a river below. The dialogue, telling of one lover leaving another (ostensibly herself), is presented in white type on a black screen. It intersperses with the action until, at the very end, image and text converge when the doll shrinks to a speck in the mist to the prophetic words, "I'm going so you'll never forget me—Mathilde." Despite the trappings of a Hollywood classic—trench coat, rain, love story—the work is more homage than replication, with a philosophic quality all its own. Several photographs from Haruko Tanaka's *Fit in Room* series serve as a visual diary of a well-known experience, trying on clothes in a women's dressing room, but the artist's direct gaze and unpretentious vul-

nerability document the more amorphous experience of the artist and, more explicitly, of a woman artist in this historic in-between time. Maybe all those images of death aren't cause for concern after all, and rather represent a form of ritual killing, a hopeful erasure of marginalization and objectification.

—Annie Buckley

Body Double closed in October at Luckman Gallery, California State University, Los Angeles. Other artists in the exhibition included Roya Falahi, Desiree Holman, Susan Lee-Chun, Gina Osterloh, Shannon Plumb, Barbara Probst, Daniela Steinfeld, Kristine Thompson and Janaina Tschäpe.

Annie Buckley is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

'Body Double' at Luckman Gallery

Numerous 2007 exhibitions highlighting the work of women artists, including the large retrospective

WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution at MOCA and *Shared Women* at LACE, gave viewers, and many writers, the opportunity to examine the influence of women artists on contemporary art history, and to attempt to locate and define the complex and at times anomalous category: feminist art. Following on the heels of what was mostly celebratory dialogue on the topic came *Body Double*, an exhibition featuring the work of sixteen artists from the United States and Europe, all women, curated by Julie Joyce and Marcos Rios. The exhibition featured photography and video works influenced by surrealism that incorporate images of the artist herself, a topic rich for study considering the emphasis on women as a subject for art. Given the place that the female nude holds in art history, from ancient figurines and sculptures, to renaissance paintings of