



Critical Distance

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No Show



Christine Kirouac

The following text was written as a reflection on the sculptural work of Christine Kirouac in No Show. It represents many informal discussions that Christine and I have shared about corporeality: limitations and strengths of our bodies, societal misconception of women with strength, norms and expectations of women's bodies, the transformational ability of the body, sex, life in utero, birth and death. This series of self-portraits are wall-mounted constructions with industrial domes, medical latex, chains, ropes, lines and backlit duratrans photographs.

The body is as the body does.

One's self portrait could be said to emanate from the function of spiritual

and corporal expression of the self-possessed individual. It isn't a simple formulation, but more a discussion of existence, both spiritual and corporal. A self-portrait is a shrine, an immortalization, a moment in time, a story, an experience, a ritual. It has the ability to represent many facets of the complete person.

The spirit body is a language body; she expresses herself in her own vocabulary and syntax. This language does not merely express the spirit but also contains it with form, content, meaning and purpose. The spirit changes and transforms with seasons and laughter and movement. The spirit moves eternally as this expression. A spiritbody is one single entity: a sanctified wholeness. Somehow, the celebration of a divided model of body and spirit still remains popular. (A spirit descending from the heavens above penetrating into the woman's womb at some precise, though heartily debated, moment of the fetus' development and returning again to the heavens once the mortal coil has been sloughed off.)

One's self-portrait almost surely brings death with it also. The corpse is the body's final moment, an ending. It is the last breath, the final words issued nostalgically from the deathbed, that contain the summarized meaning of life. The corpse of the self-portrait becomes the by-product of a ritual suicide. And surely the suicide note is the saddest self-portrait of all.

But where there is death is also the beginning for new life. The next self-portrait already in the making, as if by instinctual impulse. Long before she becomes pregnant a mother hears a voice saying: "I am here, my name is ..." The fetus is an endlessly instinctual body. She builds herself, with a pre-determined genetic knowledge, a flawless knowledge of the body. In a dream, a pregnant mother sees the face of her child smile up at her through her now transparent skin. The language of the mother's tongue already being transmitted and taught through a whisper, a murmur, a beating heart. In an ultrasound viewing of a womb, the fetus is beautifully unaware of the creative activity that she is currently engaged in. Parents, doctors, nurses, technicians gaze voyeuristically at her, observing her movements, counting her heartbeats, filling out empirical progress charts.

A small child tells her mother a story: "Once when I was inside you and I knew you were sleeping, I climbed up past your heart through your throat and pushed open your mouth so that I could see what it was like outside." And another story: "I didn't want to come out because it was so warm inside you and I had a little bunny there to play with me." The placenta mediates between mother and child,

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attending to both their needs, allowing both to retain autonomy. The mother and fetus are united in their project.

The pregnant woman is undeniable and irrevocably a sexual being. There is nothing so full of life, so climactic, beautiful, succulent, so complete. How can that which creates life not be ultimately sexual. And her sexuality is completely self-contained; it doesn't need an other, reflecting, responding, inciting, luring, to become sexualized. She radiates. She is herself, though she contains another, she is still only herself. She is sometimes vulgarly used as a metaphor.

And when she pushes her baby out, she explodes, finally and irrevocably, knowing the extreme of her own strength. And as she pushes she is both restrained by the physical limits of her own body and at the same time driven by an insane force. She can't escape, she is in bondage. The birthing body is a powerful body.

The powerful body is the one that has moved herself, pushed herself out, at her own time. Transforming from inside to out. From the fleshy muscle tissue to the surface of the skin, and then, like a wild train, pushing straight on through. Ahead and away, with blinders on. The sweat that glistens on the skin's surface, that rolls off the temple, the brow,

the shoulder blades. Like water off a duck's back.

The transformed body has a unique corporal self-knowledge. She knows well that nothing is static. She has remade her own body. Taken charge and found strength by teaching herself to push, move, fly. She is powerful by choice, dedication. The powerful body is a sexual body.

The sexual body constantly pushes to be seen, to be viewed, wishing to be a normalized function, an attribute and not a disease, not an anomaly, not a bad odor, not a freak side-show. The sexual body ripples, plays, inserts her tongue where it isn't supposed to, sings in mid-sentence like a bad musical. The sexual body teases the audience, asking them how much they want knowing full well it will always be more. She knows that to be the aggressor means that she is in charge, that she gets what she wants. If she is being watched, it's because she wants to be.

The sexual body digs a burrow, a sacred place, a hidden place, to be with her loved one(s) or simply with herself. She knows when and how much to conceal of herself. She knows when to disallow the intrusive camera, the nosy journalist, the pimp, the politician, the corpo-

rate world, the medical industry. She knows to share her sexual gift.

The sexual body, especially the female sexual body, needs rules and regulations, some say. She needs to be controlled otherwise she would be wild, out-of-control. Otherwise, she might escape.

And there is the hitch. In some kinds of reality, the female body is grotesque, endless falling from grace, endlessly giving up power. She walks as a corporate transformation of her former self. A mirror of the world around her. Each year she pumps billions upon billions of hard-earned cash, dollars, power, straight into the pockets of grinning men in business suits all with a noble purpose of maintaining her beauty. She is a fractured body. Always torn between this thought and that, this place and that, this thing and that. A female body is a societal slave.

That she has so much power, grace and beauty - how can this be so?

(acknowledging and grateful for the insights of Gloria Steinem, Kevin Waugh, Luce Irigaray, Jackie Hegal.)

Louise Loewen is a cultural worker and artist living in Winnipeg.

Critical Distance is a program of ACE ART intended to encourage critical dialogue about artists and by artists. Response is encouraged.

The views expressed in this essay are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the collective of Ace Art. Anyone interested in participating in **Critical Distance** may contact Jennifer Woodbury at (204) 944-9763 or write to Ace Art, 2nd floor, 290 McDermot Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 0T2.