

The Relationship Between Person and Object

By Victoria Zunitch, January 24, 2019



PHOTO BY VICTORIA ZUNITCH

The feathers in this piece by LaMont Hamilton at SculptureCenter transgress people's personal space with light unwanted touching.



PHOTO BY VICTORIA ZUNITCH

"Dirt Eater" by Kiyon Williams.

Who are you?

Do you answer with your profession, or by listing which countries your ancestors came from, or maybe whom or how you love?

You are your body. That's the most elemental definition, as it reduces you to your physical presentation.

And it's the most complex definition, as the corpus contains all of your physicalities plus the nonphysical. Your emotions. Your social status. Your soul, if you have one.

"In Practice: Other Objects" explores the ways in which the object that is your body interacts with objects that aren't.

At an opening reception for the exhibit at the SculptureCenter in Long Island City on a recent Sunday, there was a near-absence of bodily representations in the works. This forced the imagination to consider how the body might react to the presented tools, activities and random objects.

"From personal belongings to material evidence, sites of memory, and revisionist fantasies, the artists in Other Objects highlight curious and ecstatic moments in which a body becomes a thing or a thing stands in for a body," says the gallery brochure for the exhibit.

The video, photography and mixed media sculptures by Katherine Sim—ne Reynolds, the gallery notes say, "explore the presentability politics that inspire and conceal Black women's labor in the areas of personal glamour and domestic work." Her "Ironing Board Sculpture 2," 2018, is about "presentability politics," the notes say.

If we brandish with impunity an identity, are we committing "identity politics"? Or is the mainstream practicing identity politics by asking us to melt into the pot? Kiyon Williams confronts us with an extreme identity, what the gallery

notes call “transgressive identity,” in “Dirt Eater,” 2019. The practice, known as geophagia, is believed to have been used in some areas of the world for much of human history for pleasure, to fight hunger or possibly as the result of a nutritional deficiency such as anemia. The practice was used by enslaved West African people in America, and Williams’ installation feels like a challenge to judge. What’s disgusting about this image? It isn’t the dirt-eating.

Guests at the opening were quite skilled at taking a nonchalant attitude toward navigating through a field of ceiling-mounted feathers that transgressed their personal space with a light touch on the head. The long, white ostrich feathers tickled and interfered as people initiated or continued conversations, masterfully in denial, as if they weren’t bobbing and weaving among the wispy whimsies. The presumptuous feathers in this piece by LaMont Hamilton commit plenty of unwanted touching. Its name is “JW., R.H., H.D., E.R., N.H.P. (whispering of the self to the self),” and aside from the ostrich feathers, it includes bells, recorded sound and light.

Aliza Shvarts presents a state-by-state collection of the kits used to gather evidence of that attempt at personhood erasure known as rape. Some of the kits carry a gender expectation that rape victims are women. As difficult as it is for women to report rape, a male victim must additionally overcome an additional bias that his body doesn’t qualify as rape victim material. If he overcomes all that and shows up at an emergency room, a kit designed to collect evidence from females can erase him all over again.

The other artists with pieces in the exhibit include Natalie Ball, Takming Chuang, Niloufar Emamifar, Ariel RenÉ Jackson, Rosa Sijben and David Bernstein, Sara Stern and Kenneth Tam.

Both “In Practice” and Turkish conceptual artist Banu Cennetoglu’s inaugural U.S. solo exhibit run through March 25.

‘In Practice: Other Objects’

When: Through Mon., March 25

Where: SculptureCenter, 44-19 Purves St., Long Island City

Entry: \$10 suggested; \$5 students.

(718) 361-1750,

sculpture-center.org