

CV Photo

Expositions

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Expositions

Alexa Wright

Articule, Montreal

September 9 – October 8, 2000

Projecting the agency of the ego and the power of the image in an age obsessed with identity politics, performative fiction, and digital truth, Alexa Wright reveals disabled versions of herself in her solo exhibition at Articule, *I*. This series of eight self-portraits has Wright occupying deformed and disfigured bodies; she has achieved this effect by combining her likeness with those of physically disabled people. Looking out from the frame, she maintains a self-confident demeanour that charges the portraits with visible irony and contradiction. Loaded metaphors connect the images, and these distortions allow for interpretations of the multiplicity of the artist. Using posturing techniques employed in the long-winded tradition of self-portraiture, Wright momentarily suspends disbelief of her physical metamorphosis from image to image by confronting the viewer with a constant, stately gaze. This look dismisses disabled stereotypes of weakness, vulnerability, and abject ugliness with cold, clinical detachment and reclaims a position of power not complicated by physical insecurity. This self-possession is further underlined by Wright's choice of castle-like settings; velvet curtains hanging over large windows, grand high-ceilinged halls, and oak-paneled walls serve as the backdrops for her portraits. Class functions as a mediator between public perceptions of the disabled and the isolated disability by situating Wright as the dominating figure. Not only is this position of elite classism used to contribute to Wright's performed strength, but it allows Wright to sneak in art history through another door. Female figures portrayed in marble statues, oil paintings, and rich tapestries have been placed in direct proximity to Wright's selves so that the viewer is able to compare bodies constructed for their visual pleasure: those carved out of marble and those rearranged in PhotoShop.

With no telltale glue seams, conflicting perspectives, or computer-manipulated glitches scarring the images, Wright's portraits also speak to the questionable authenticity of photographic truth. Representing reality through its manipulation, Wright's bodies are coated with meaning as thickly as their skins. Her shifting body is able to represent the proof of deformity while expanding the possibilities of representation. The corporal self is rendered in digital technology while representing its own manipulation.



Wright uses "her" body to address the history of the female nude in classical and contemporary art practice. The portrait in which Wright has only one arm, reminiscent of the *Venus de Milo*, pushes the historical perspective of objectifying the female body by giving Wright a sexual presence. Dressed in a symbolically loaded red satin gown, Wright takes one step forward and bares a seductive gaze. Her sexual availability is further implied both by the marble nude that stands in the foreground, and its backside reflection in the window behind her. Here, Wright re-contextualizes and re-presents the female subject by staging the disabled body as a sexual body while still comparing it to the classical ideal. Far from being disempowering or insinuating victimization, Wright restores a sexual confidence to an identity that the asexual stereotype assumes that it doesn't possess. By distorting and twisting the "perfect" female form and revealing its imperfections, Wright twists our preconceptions about beauty, persona, and body image. She points out that the female body is even more riddled with politics when disfigured and manipulated.

Dayna McLeod



I
Color digital prints
85 X 110 cm
1999

Expositions



William Eakin

Have A Nice Day: Alien Nation

Fujiflex Crystal Archive prints

102 X 127 cm

1998

Open Studio: William Eakin

St. Norbert Arts Centre, Winnipeg

June 4 – September 24, 2000

William Eakin

Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg

September 28, 2000 – January 7, 2001

Winnipeg artist William Eakin works on a vast scale, as both a collector of objects and a maker of photographs. It comes as no surprise, then, that it was necessary to have two significant exhibitions of his work last year in order to represent his art practice. The first, *Open Studio: William Eakin*, was a component of Eakin's four-month residency at the St. Norbert Arts Centre during the summer of 2000. During this period, the public was able to follow his art-making process as it transformed his fascinating collection of the mundane, "The World's Greatest Collection of Everyday Objects," into digital photographs. While the St. Norbert project provides insight into the artist's working process, the second exhibition, *William Eakin*, at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG), provides context and presents a mid-career survey of Eakin's work.

Eakin's amazing collection is wide-ranging and serves as a vast cultural sea of objects for creating a personal image bank. The artist assumes the role of digital magician, who uses technology to turn popular culture into high art. His collections are gathered from the margins of culture, objects more closely associated with kitsch than camera art. Black-velvet matador paintings, souvenir plates of Niagara Falls, beer-bottle caps, and bowling trophies are among the objects recast to provoke us to reflect upon them as symbols of our consumer society.

Eakin has a fascinating ability to transform the ordinary into icon, as shown by the innocent bowling-trophy figure of a policeman transmuted to a monumental scale with a playful yet threatening edge.

The photographs in the WAG exhibition, thoughtfully curated by James Patten, include images from six series: *Home Sweet Home* (1993–94), *Monument* (1994–95), *Night Garden* (1995), *Alien Nation* (1998), *Newsprint* (1998), and *Bottle Cap* (1998), two of which are being shown for the first time. Particularly haunting is *Night Garden*, a series of images of cake-tin lids that feature magnificent specimens of floral still life (cf. *CVphoto* 52, p. 6). Yet this is a garden of a different type: flowers frozen in time, not once but twice. First, they have been captured as decorative elements to attract consumers' attention; then, a second time, by Eakin's camera, which transforms them into cultural artifacts. They are then arranged as a gridded series of circular images that appear to float against a simple black background that references the darkness of night. Still bearing second-hand-store prices and often chipped from use, these banal yet strangely beautiful objects balance delicately between utility and aesthetics. Eakin is a cultural *vigneron* cultivating, pruning, and harvesting his vineyard; we, the spectators, are left to taste, savour, and wonder at the enigma that results.

Susan Close