

Exhibition centers on gender and feminist politics in the age of trans-identity



Invisible Women, 2012

NEW YORK - The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation announces The Intersectional Self, an exhibition centered on gender and feminist politics in the age of trans-identity, on view from February 9 through May 19, 2017. Featuring the work of Janine Antoni, Andrea Bowers, Patty Chang, Abigail deVille, Ana Mendieta, Catherine Opie, Adrian Piper, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Cindy Sherman, and Martha Wilson, The Intersectional Self questions how notions of femininity (and alternately, masculinity) have shifted in the context of newly defined gender identities, and how family structures have been reimagined and reshaped through relatively recent advances in reproductive medicine and evolving gender roles. Ultimately, The Intersectional Self examines how feminism in its many forms has changed the world as we know it.

Sculpture and video works by Abigail DeVille and Andrea Bowers highlight inequities based on racial, economic, gender, and immigrant identities that pervade society. Using found objects and materials, DeVille explains that her process of assemblage is an exercise in acknowledgement. Of her works she says,

“I think of trash as a record of existence, that these things were used by people. They are the archeological evidence of the present moment. History is permeating everything, whether you know it or not.” Also serving as a historical record is Bowers’ Roundtable Discussion (2016) that features Patrisse Cullors, Jennicet Gutierrez, and CeCe McDonald. Cullors is one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, Gutierrez is an undocumented trans-immigrant activist, and McDonald is a trans activist who served time in an all-male prison. Together they discuss black liberation, the prison system, gender, and immigration.

Ana Mendieta’s identification as a Latina artist and Third World feminist is not only linked to her experience of migrating from Cuba to the United States in Operation Peter Pan, but also her studies at the University of Iowa, a place not associated with diversity, especially in the early 1970s. Her Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants), 1972, coincides both chronologically and thematically with Adrian Piper’s Mythic Being (1972-75) and Martha Wilson’s Posturing series (1972-73). Wilson and Piper use performative embodiment to explore

ideas of otherness. While otherness can connote the marginal, the two artists exploit masculinity to draw attention to the inequities that women artists faced at the time these works were produced, especially in the realm of conceptual art, a movement dominated by men. Through photography, interventions and video, Mendieta, Wilson, and Piper hone in on the gestures of drag and persona play performances to show the multiplicity of identities possible at any given moment, and in any given woman.

The changing and complicated nature of family is unpacked and performed in deeply personal ways by Janine Antoni, Catherine Opie, and Patty Chang. Antoni's *Mom and Dad* (1994) depicts her parents who have been made-up to look like one another, taking on the gender of the other. The three photographs capture her mother and father in prosthetic makeup and wigs, transformed into versions of each other. Of the project, Antoni describes the piece as a kind of self-portrait, explaining that "What became fascinating during the process was the resistance or the impossibility of turning my parents into each other...what I was arriving at was half-mom, half-dad creature, but to create this composite, I had to reverse our roles in the sense that my parents made me, and now I was remaking them." Opie's *Self Portrait/Nursing* (2004) challenges stereotypes of the butch/femme dichotomy in lesbian culture, in a pictorial format associated with Old Master paintings of mother and child. In her performance video *In Love* (2001), Patty Chang demonstrates the intimacy implied by the parent-child relationship by reversing the process of jointly eating a raw onion in gestural embrace that pushes against

the audience's sense of decorum and comfort.

Like the idea of a child as the composite of two parents' identities, Genesis Bryer P-Orridge has merged male and female genders into one pandrogynous self. Where Cindy Sherman's experiments in multiple personalities express the nuanced and continuously shifting versions of self, Genesis' collaboration with Lady Jaye has been a long-term evolution that ultimately results in the merging of gender binaries into one self-determined being. Both Sherman and Genesis use their bodies as the site of their artistic production; Sherman's manifold characterizations eclipse her own personae as artist, and Genesis Breyer P-Orridge have dissolved two into one, embodying the lived experience of their artwork. According to Genesis, "Everything is mutable. Names can be changed, bodies can be adjusted, imagery can be adjusted to tell a story or to hide a story."

As the artists featured in *The Intersectional Self* expand on the possibilities of gender expression and fluidity, they make clear there is no single approach to feminist transformation, aside from the agency to engage with sex on their own terms.