

I've Only Known My Own

Nicole Burisch - curator



Autumn Knight, *Documents*, 2016
Performance | © Lynn Lane

OPTICA CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN

Exhibition April, 21 - June, 10, 2017
Tuesday to Saturday, 12 pm to 5 pm

Friday, April, 21 2017

Performance 12 pm to 6 pm

Ursula Johnson

Public Presentation 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm

Autumn Knight

Topological Media Lab and Milieux Copresentation
Concordia University: 1515, Sainte Catherine St West |
11th Floor, Milieux Conference Room EV 11.705

Opening 6 pm to 8 pm

Saturday, April 22, 2017 - 1 pm to 3 pm

Round-table

In the presence of Nicole Burisch and the artists

Saturday, May 27, 2017 - 2 pm to 4 pm

Performance

Nadège Grebmeier Forget

Saturday, June 3, 2017 - 2 pm to 4 pm

Performance

Autumn Knight

Family Saturdays Workshop for Kids

4 years and older

Saturdays, April 29 and June 10

1 pm - 4 pm

Free | No reservation required

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I've Only Known My Own is a group exhibition that explores how the materiality of the body is represented through measurements, process, and documentation. In many ways, the performance-based works included in this project reference and respond to the legacies of feminist and conceptual art. They reflect upon how the matter of the body might act as a force that generates its own (il)logical systems, and how this material embodiment might function as a form of resistance. *I've Only Known My Own* also considers how the material body might intersect with new technologies, be altered or amplified through various modes of communication, take on forms of mediated presence, and activate questions around the presentation and dissemination of ephemera.

Rather than presenting a fixed set of works, the exhibition evolves over the course of its run, with objects, props, and actions being set in motion during the presentation of each of the four performances. First presented in Houston in the spring of 2016, the four artists were invited to revisit, re-perform or reinterpret their earlier performances for this second iteration at Optica, and to bring forward traces or echoes from the first exhibition. By reassembling these artists and works, the second version of the presents further opportunities to consider the role of documentary traces, as well as the evolution of each work in relation to this new site.

Ursula Johnson's past performances have used traditional Mi'kmaw basket weaving techniques to trace Indigenous bodies' presence within -and resistance to- legacies of colonial legislation and control. Through strategies of duration and display, her work interrogates outdated ethnographic and anthropological approaches to understanding Indigenous cultural practices. For this exhibition Johnson will present *hide*, a performance that uses leather tanning processes learned from her family and from YouTube tutorials to explore how material knowledge is transmitted from place to place, and from body to body - substituting a piece of fun fur in place of real animal hide. As in her other works, skillful making is downplayed in favour of an extended and difficult physical exertion, placing her body in close relation to her chosen material, and gradually improving her craft with each subsequent performance. Here, the body in question could equally be that of the animal (its form and qualities determining specific processes), or that of a body-of-knowledge generated through the repeated performance of the task and translated through alternate materials.

In **Michelle Lacombe's** multi-phase project *Of All the Watery Bodies, I Only Known My Own*, the artist used a monthly measurement of the volume of blood in her body to determine the placement of a tattooed water line around her calves. Here, the body's cyclical fluctuations became a rule for generating a monthly performative ritual, and a way of temporarily documenting and queering an unused reproductive potential. If, as in Sol LeWitt's well-known pronouncement on conceptual art, "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art," Lacombe's project reworks this proposition: the fluctuations of the body become the machine that makes the art. In Houston, Lacombe cut into a series of photographs she took of the moon, and then returned the final 13th moon to her body by tattooing a new waterline mark onto her abdomen. At Optica, Lacombe will present *The Mother Moon*, which begins with the distribution of temporary tattoos that reproduce this circular shape. These will be offered for free until they run out. Once (or if) depleted, she will present a second action that will make the mark permanent.

Nadège Grebmeier Forget's ongoing series *One on one's for so-called fans* involves private performances that are then translated through oral accounts and performative re-tellings, and continues the artist's investigations into the role of documentation and technology in mediating access to her performing body. *Walls of Wind: The mirroring and rendering*, the latest in this series, takes up the idea of mirroring - responding first to the architectural features of the Houston gallery (and the performance that happened there), and then again to their absence in Montreal. While she initially limits the audience for her work, setting parameters around when and how she is seen, Grebmeier Forget then relinquishes control, relying on her chosen witnesses to transmit (sometimes inaccurately, but always personally) the story of what they experienced. The decadence and generosity of her performances are contrasted with her more austere architectural interventions which use forms that reference gallery spaces and display strategies. These spaces, while empty, are nevertheless invested with the presence of the actions that they once hosted.

Autumn Knight often uses conventions and props drawn from theatre, reworking these into performances that trouble the divisions between gallery and stage, performer and audience. Walking a line between something scripted and spontaneous, her performances centre the roles and presence of Black women, and use dialog, voices, and gestures to uncover and critique structures of power. Her performance *Documents* involves a public reading of the documentation that serves to authenticate or legitimize citizenship, adapted this time for a Canadian (and more specifically, Montreal) context. Central to this work is a filing cabinet that both holds the props required for the performance, while also serving as a portrait or trace of Knight herself. Knight's interactive reading of the documents in the files addresses the embodied specificities of race, class, and gender to contest whether these categories accurately reflect the bodies they are meant to represent - while underlining how different audiences and relationships to power may influence this reading.

Central to this project is an interest in experimenting with the forms and sites for presenting performance art, and the ways in which artists, audiences, curators, and writers might work together to do this. In addition to these performances and traces, a small publication featuring documentation from the Houston performances, an extended curatorial essay, and a commissioned text by scholar **Mikhel Proulx** is also available in the gallery.

- Nicole Burisch

Nicole Burisch (Ottawa, ON/Montreal, QC) is a curator, critic, and cultural worker. With a background working in artist-run centres, her projects focus on discourses of craft, feminism, performance, publishing, labour, and materiality within contemporary art.

This project has largely been generated through the conversations that I had (and continue to have) with the artists who participated in the exhibition. I am profoundly grateful for their willingness to think through these ideas with me, and for their openness in creating works that continue to generate new and productive questions. I am also grateful to Mikhel Proulx, who has supported me in more ways than I can list here. Thanks to my cohort and colleagues in the Core Program, who, along with visitors Amelia Jones, Jennifer Doyle, and Huey Copeland, provided valuable feedback on the Houston exhibition. A big thanks also to the staff and board at Optica, for all their help and organization. -NB

OPTICA is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, and the Conseil des arts de Montréal. OPTICA's educational program is supported by the ministère de la Culture et des Communications and the City of Montreal as part of the Entente sur le développement culturel de Montréal and the Caisse Desjardins du Plateau-Mont-Royal. OPTICA is a member of the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec and of Regroupement Pied Carré.