



SAM KINSLEY
Evidence of Action

Art as Body: on Sam Kinsley's abstract self-portraiture

By Virginia Mitford

Evidence of Action displays the results of Sam Kinsley's beautiful and painstaking meditations on her physical body. This accumulation of shell-like ceramic vessels, delicate embossed marks on paper and bundles of discarded hair manages to both distill and expand upon what a self portrait is in its essence and what it has the power to do on a personal and political level.

Kinsley methodically documents the realities of our bodies that we routinely observe, attempt to control and even obsess over--these changing patterns of marks and wrinkles on skin, our gain and loss of weight, the hair loss that is all a testament to our inevitable aging and mundane daily body-care routines. Her self portraiture in the exhibition defines her physicality in an abstract way but in the clear terms of her own choosing. For instance, her etchings included in this show use the lines/creases/wrinkles on her skin as a guide for each abstract drawing. Though straightforward in many ways, Kinsley's art gathers depth and meaning as the pieces fall back and forth between being curious objects and referring to what they represent. Kinsley's bodily experience and the art objects she creates become so close together in the process of creation that the art is less a representation of an aspect of the body, than an extension of it. The line between the two is made even hazier by the inclusion in the show of actual bodily detritus (a year of hair loss).

Sam Kinsley's larger art practice looks not only to the physical body but also to how we perceive our self-worth in terms of numbers (our budget but also the numbers that define our identities on credit or ID cards) and in doing so invites us to examine our own arbitrary systems and numbers that define our identity and how we value ourselves. In her self portrait series *Mass*, an undulating roll of paper is intricately textured with an organic murmuration-like formation of a seemingly impossible number of pinpricks, each documenting one cent of money lost or gained in her budget. With her amount of debt blatantly but poetically laid out in full view, we can view normally hidden personal details in a dispassionate way, seeing each drawing/object as a satisfying and interesting material formation in itself, and almost separate ourselves from what the art represents. This puts the viewer in an odd position of being witness to details about Kinsley's life that would normally be kept private, or even taboo. Subjects such as weight, wealth/debt, and bodily waste can all have the capacity to carry a burden of

shame and anxiety in our particular society; however, Kinsley explores such subjects in a way which is elegant rather than crude and satisfying rather than discomforting.

In response to a long history of women's bodies being continually objectified in society and visual culture, Kinsley essentially turns her own body into an object, yet she does so with control and with her own clear parameters to her mark and object-making. Through self-portraiture like this she takes control of her own representation in a society that consistently threatens to rob women* and LGBTQ2S+ people of their agency. The clear framework of making means the pieces are hardly abstract, but the variable and imaginative forms and drawings that grow out of Kinsley's documentations imply an emotionality to seemingly unbiased observations. Her artistic practice hinges on a kind of data collection of her own lived experience, essentially subverting the world of 'objective' science that has been historically dominated by men.

It is exciting to see work like this that unflinchingly focuses in on the self in such a vulnerable way, free from any pretension or instagram filters--a slow consideration of the realities of a body in our age of quick and often posed selfies on social media. At the same time, Kinsley's work makes it feel OK and even necessary to spend time focusing on ourselves in the way many of us crave, whether it is through selfie-taking or other acts of self-care and introspection. By presenting *Evidence of Action: Weight* as a large collection of vessels on a plinth that evokes a museum display of ancient pottery or a monument, Kinsley creates an homage to her own body, implying that personal histories are worthy of commemoration and that our changing bodies--particularly as women—are consistently entitled to respect.

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Virginia Mitford is a multidisciplinary artist who divides her time between the Yukon and Newfoundland. She currently lives in Mayo YT

*(including trans women and anyone who is femme/feminine some of the time)

SAM KINSLEY

Evidence of Action

Oct 4 - Nov 8, 2018



ARTIST STATEMENT

In my practice I employ the ways I am defined in society to create my own systems of self description; my economy, physicality, and culture translated into self-portraits.

This exhibition focuses on my physicality. I chart my body's changes and investigate the slow accumulation of my bodily by-products. I use my personal self-care and beauty rituals as routine collection methods, documenting the evidence of my physical existence. The accumulated matter, lip prints, hair, and finger-prints are used for creating drawings, prints, installations, and performance. By ritualizing these routine, mundane tasks I seek to take authority over how I am portrayed, and to exercise my ability to self identify.

Through these drawings and prints, I aim to portray my ageing feminine body in ways that are subtle, beautiful, systematic, and unusual; to create a series of portraits that are abstract, yet specific and representative. They are evidence of rumination on personal, perceptions of beauty, value, worth, and labour.

EVIDENCE OF ACTION.

Evidence of Action is a 4 piece exhibition, each piece describing an element of my physicality; a large ceramic sculpture describing my weight; a 35 sheet print piece my skin, using the changing lines on my body and age as parameters for mark making; and two human hair sculptures, a documentation of my hair loss and rejection over one year.

BIOGRAPHY

Sam Kinsley is an interdisciplinary artist of settler ancestry living in unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people in K'jiputuk (Halifax), where she received a BFA from NSCAD University. Sam uses drawing, performance, printmaking, and ceramics to investigate alternative forms of portraiture.

samjkinsley.ca

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Box 8000 | Dawson City, Yukon
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