

Bitmap: International Digital Photo Project

Kahn, Sophie

By Alexie Glass

Crystalline and fragmented, a whirling digital dervish, the spectral figure that spins and twists as if encapsulated in a techno-web in Sophie Kahn's series of images, *Strange to inhabit the earth*, is at once the product of futuristic ambition, yet also, conversely, resonating with a more profound sense of the memorial and the intimate. Kahn's data-bodies are the result of combining 3D scanning software-technology intended for architectural imaging-with two-dimensional photographic practices. Taking as the point of departure her body, the scanned image does not depict an inanimate object (this is an impossibility with the human body constantly in flux) and is instead an evocative rendering of an imperfect impression of the body, a body that resists the representations of the literal and figurative. Kahn's body is a corporeal form that embraces the dichotomies of stasis and motion, the actual and the virtual.

This vulnerable body, outstretched and exposed, eyes closed, flesh transformed into intersecting pixellated planes, is prone as if submitting to a medical procedure - an invasive and porous documentation. There is an impression in this finely veiled figure of what it might be to feel at once inside and outside the self, a brush with intangible and



inevitable truth of mortality. The artist describes the "frozen attitude" of the scanned bodies as resembling "death masks or other forms of memorial portraiture" and, indeed, the images are reminiscent of early forms of spirit photography and Victorian death-mask portraiture. And similarly to these deathly archives that aimed to immortalise something of the beloved, Kahn's strangers may have once been of the living, but we resist believing one of us. It is in this intersection between uncanny images that seemingly reference a time past, fused with the creative misuse of high-end technology, that we feel the static: the artist imbues the viewer with a sense of individual fragility and the potential of the digital to transcend that which is otherwise mere matter.

SOPHIE KAHN b:1980 London, UK, she was raised in Melbourne, Australia.

Originally trained as a photographer Kahn completed a BA (Hons) in Fine Arts and History of Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2001; and graduated from Spatial Information Architecture, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), 2003. Kahn has lectured and tutored in Photomedia, and been employed by the Royal Children's Hospital, where she conducted research into 3D medical imaging. Kahn is based in Melbourne but is temporarily living and working in New York.

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