

Transfigured: Sophie Kahn

By Alex Naase



Machines for Suffering:

Machines for Suffering is the visual culmination of the artist's ongoing investigation into female hysteria. A once prevalent but now discredited diagnosis, hysteria was once an incredibly common and exceedingly broad disorder mainly applied to women. Working from photographic documentation of female hysteria patients at the Salpêtrière hospital in 19th Century France, Kahn choreographs dancers to recreate for her 3D scanner the poses exploited by the medical community to codify madness. Kahn intentionally utilizes a 3D scanner unequipped to capture the human body, leaving her with an incredibly fragmented image of the female form. Printing the results of this scan with the autogenerated scaffolding resulting from the program's response to an unbalanced print, Kahn creates sculptures and images which suggest a body or psyche in the paradoxical processes of both construction and demolition.

Working from a background in photography and art history, the artist's post-photographic work sets her in dialogue with the history of medical photography and its impact on the development of photographic technology. Kahn's interest in exposing the way technology fails to capture life starkly contrasts with the 19th Century belief that photography was a means of capturing and

presenting a "medical truth." With a title alluding to a quote by Pablo Picasso said to his mistress Françoise Gilot: "Women are machines for suffering," the series offers a potent statement about the production and consumption of female anguish, especially relevant in the time of #MeToo.





Bust of a Woman II:

With a background in photography, Sophie Kahn moved to using a 3D laser scanner and printer in order to investigate the same questions of body, time, memory, loss, and history, that she sought to tackle through her photographs. An eerie decomposing image of a woman's face, eyeless and with a gaping mouth, evokes the image of a death mask—a face entirely stripped of life. Utilizing technology unequipped to capture the human body, each time Kahn's subject moves or breathes the 3D rendering fragments on screen. What results from printing these scans is a sculptural work seemingly decomposing from the moment of its inception, which Kahn further exacerbates by physically damaging the printed rendering. These death masks in turn resemble post-apocalyptic artifacts, specters of the recording technology man utilizes to try and freeze time. Kahn's sculptures destabilize notions of "all seeing" and "all knowing" technology by exposing the ways in which technology can fail to capture life, and exploring "the poetics of those failures."



Originally published as a part of C24 Gallery's series of Transfigured exhibition essays.