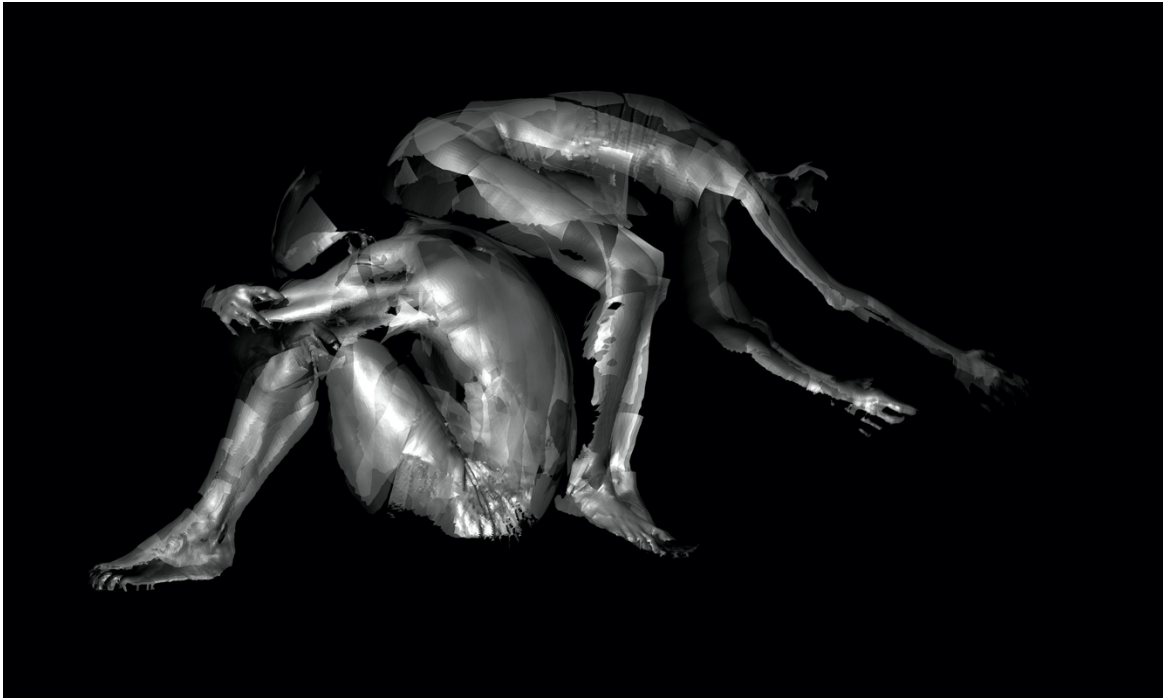


# A Language for Intimacy: Sophie Kahn

By Amanda Contrada



Lately I have become preoccupied with the idea that the only way I can continue to hold myself together is by being held. It's a feeling that has grown and become more complicated as the weeks and months of social distancing have ticked by. It's no longer an abstract concept about the loss of physical intimacy, as it was at the outset of the pandemic. Nor is it something that I only consider when I'm upset. The lack of contact has become a physiological deficiency that aches me at all times. As this pain grows, the image that I have of myself, the corporealization of my consciousness, waivers between two extremes: something soft and weak that needs support, needs someone to envelop me and create a scaffold to hold my weight; and alternately something hard, a calcified object, petrified by the tension of trying to hold myself together without any external support. These avatars of myself float in space, dissolving into the same interior void that created it.

Sophie Kahn's *Divers* (2020) depict figures that float in a similar void, materializing as fragments of emotions expressed through the body. Their attitudes are vulnerable, adopting poses of comfort and self-preservation. Kahn's images are avatars of her figures' thoughts and feelings, caught and suspended in the process of moving, morphing, evolving, and disintegrating. In my yearning for tactility, I can't determine which images are more heartbreaking. Are they the images of these

avatars together, touching and yet appearing unaware of each other, as though they have lost sensation and don't know where their bodies meet and overlap? Or the images that show them alone, their bodies draped and curled to accentuate the negative space where another person could be.



Like the avatar I have created for my consciousness, Kahn's avatars feel as though they're always moving, always changing. What we see are simply still frames of moving images. The 3D laser scanning technology that Kahn uses to scan her models is not meant to scan human bodies that breathe, move, and change. As a result, the scans have inconsistencies, areas where there was movement between two strokes of the technology to capture a limb, where part of the body didn't register. The resulting scans, manipulated and morphed into fractal wraiths, are gestures of life and emotion, not

exact simulacra of human anatomy. As faceless, incomplete avatars they possess a different power than a photograph. They become vessels for the viewer's self-image—3D models onto which we can project our emotions and anxieties.

In a world that is rapidly changing, and feels simultaneously suspended in animation, the pain of isolation and the willful desensitization toward contact merge together and exist concurrently, if not paradoxically. Perhaps the main reason why Kahn's Divers resonate with me so much is because those inconsistencies and contradictions live in the cracks and voids in the images, and it is that same negative space that makes these avatars a more complete or realistic representation of human life.

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