

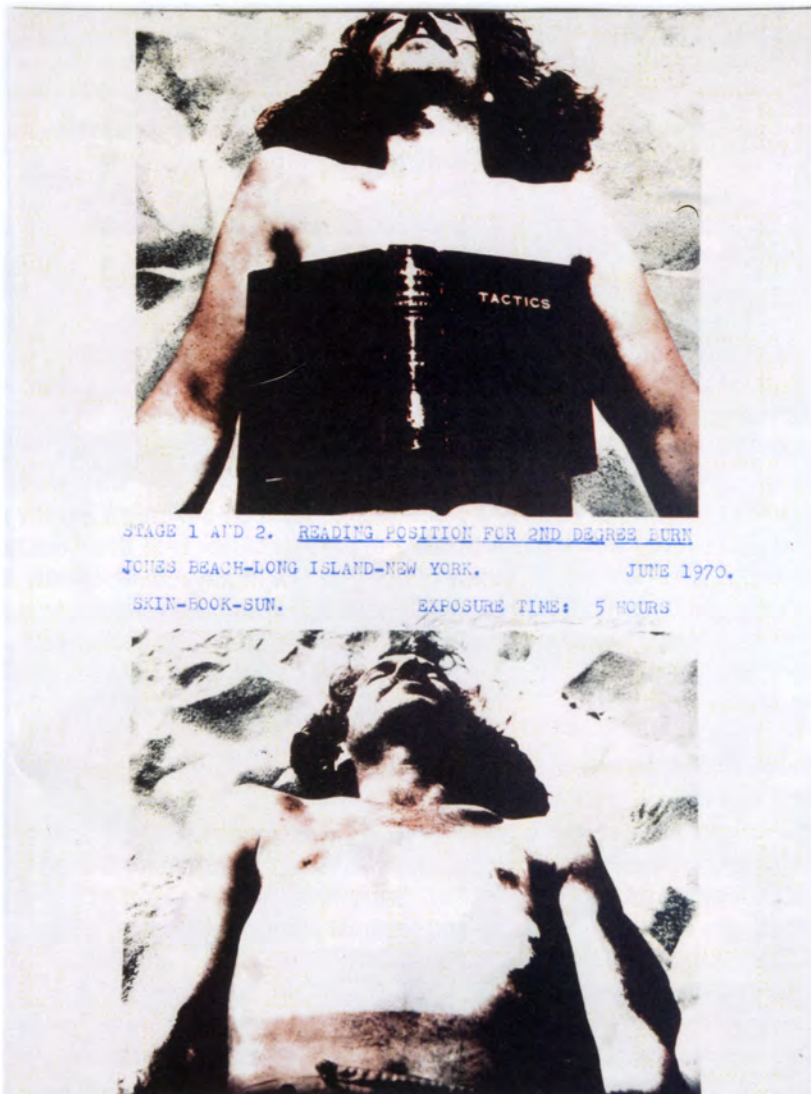


BODY OF WORK

Curated by Tori Fleming

July 24 - 28, 2012

Anna Leonowens Gallery
1891 Granville St
Halifax, NS



Reading Position for Second Degree Burn, Dennis Oppenheim. Lithograph, 1971

Featuring Work By

Vito Acconci

David Albert

Spencer Davenport

John Greer

Dennis Oppenheim

Brooklyn Stewart

Joyce Wieland



Wedding. David Albert, Video, 2012.

these relatively small acts can be disturbing. One still in the upper left depicts Oppenheim's fingernail being forcibly peeled after being stuck between two pieces of wood. He said of this particular still "Since our bodies are constantly generating material, building surfaces, changing physiognomy, the fingernail project was a method of tapping into this productive cycle." (Oppenheim, 1974) This relatively small act is universally known to audiences as being incredibly painful and, like the reaction to Albert's eyelids, it becomes quite difficult for the viewer to not be hyper aware of their own fingernails.

Acconci, like Oppenheim, also marks the surface of his skin for *Trademarks*, a lithograph documenting an earlier performance. Acconci adds to this work by biting himself multiple times on whichever sections of his skin he can reach. He then inks up these marks and presses them onto the lithograph thus using his body as a form of printmaking. To create a mark that would last on his body long enough to print it Acconci would have to bite himself with significant pressure. This self-inflicted pain adds to the discomfort of the piece by displaying a strong determination to self-harm.

The body is an organic form that we can manipulate. Dennis Oppenheim explores this in his piece *Reading Position for Second Degree Burn* (NSCAD Lithography Workshop, 1970). The work documents a performance of Oppenheim lying on a beach for five hours with a book on his chest in the hot sun until he had made a print on his own body. Oppenheim has said of this work that it "incorporates an inversion or reversal of energy expenditure. The body was an exposed plane, a captive surface...I allowed myself to be painted – my skin to become pigment." (Oppenheim, 1974)

Spencer Davenport, a current NSCAD undergraduate student, uses his body as an organic form that he can sculpt. In his work *100% Pure Apple Wizz* Davenport spent a week ingesting solely apple juice. Before and after this period he took photos documenting the changes to his body. He also documented this piece by saving the bottles that the juice came in; day-by-day labeling the bottles by the date and urinating back into them. Although the photos show little change to his body, the bottles show a dramatic change to the inside of his body. The volume he urinates each day increases throughout the weeks and there is a constant colour change. This incredibly personal inventory points to a strong awareness of how we can be the curators of our own forms.

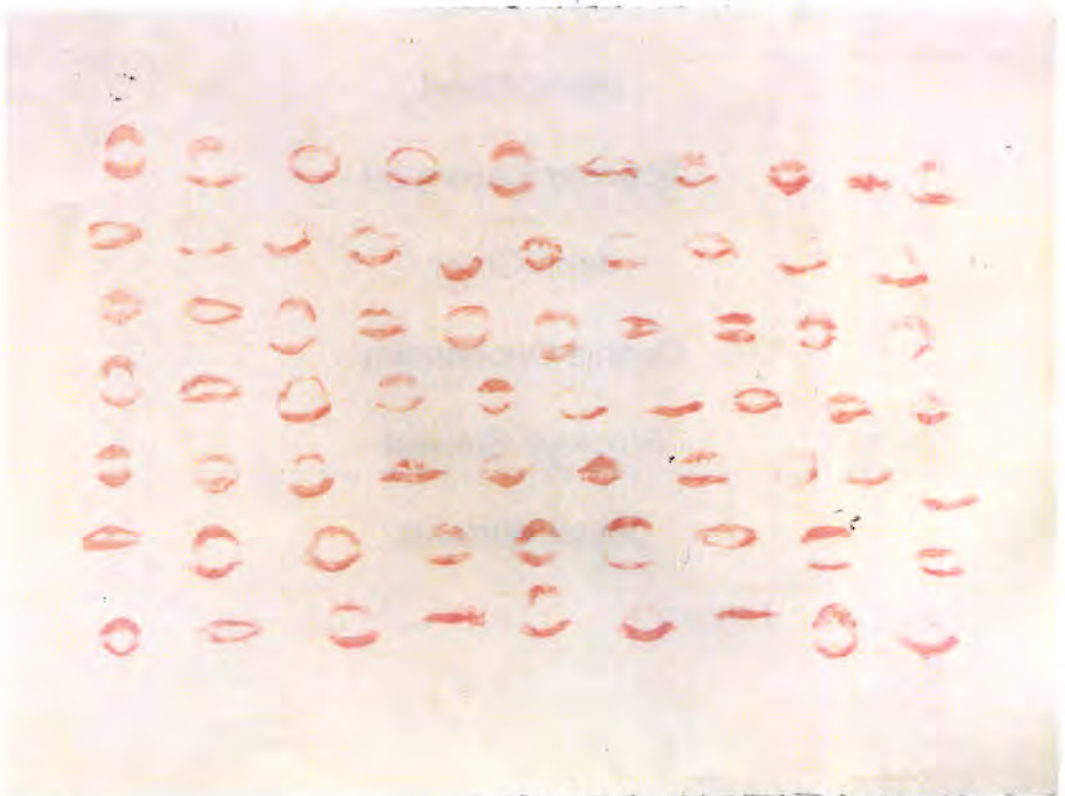
The limits to which we can push our bodies, change our bodies, or make our bodies stronger is endlessly seductive. It is a fascination that makes us value athletes as heroes and strive for world records. It is for this reason that Yves Klien, in a pursuit to seem larger than life, depicts himself flying through the air after leaping off a building in his 1960's photograph *Le Saut Dans le Vide* (*Leap Into the Void.*) There is still mystery around how the photo was taken; and although there are multiple accounts of just how Klien safely

leaped off the building, no single story is agreed upon. In a way flying is the ultimate unattainable body function. No human can do it but still hundreds of contraptions have been built to create that feeling. In John Greer's lithograph *Y.D. Klien*, Greer appropriates this image and places on top of Klien's face, another face in a blue – both faces are blissful and have no panic about the possibility of falling. The lithograph adds yet another layer of the surreal onto this iconic image of a body with superhuman abilities.

The body is a huge part of our identity... how we dress it, the way it looks, how other people view it. In Brooklyn Stewart's piece *First Impressions* she puts a new spin on the idea of the fingerprint as an identifier. As a current NSCAD student and printmaker Stewart was intrigued by the taboo of the fingerprint on prints. Because of the oils on skin, when a fingerprint is pressed onto a lithography stone it picks up ink and results in a stain on the finished print. Instead of rubbing her hands on the stone however, Stewart inked up her breasts and made a print of her chest. Ironically, for this unapologetic image of a body the stone was not prepared in NSCAD's lithography studio but in a private bathroom after hours. Making this piece privately brings up the question: why was there was still a required privacy in the act of making a piece designed to un-sexualize a body part? This is a self-portrait of Stewart, but unlike a traditional portrait of her face that could be identified by anyone who knows her, this is a view of her that few, if any, could identify right away. It signifies a body part shared by half the world and at the same time is a completely unique identifier of a singular person, much like a fingerprint. In a society where even breastfeeding in public is still a subject for debate, this print is a very straightforward, un-sexualized look at a body.

It seems every artist who has ever been warned not to touch the lithography stone has felt the urge to break the rules of this tradition. In 1971 Joyce Wieland (also during NSCAD's lithography workshop) used her body to print for her lithograph *Oh, Canada*. Rather than drawing with a grease pencil, traditionally used in lithography, Wieland used lipstick to play with NSCAD's identity as well as her own. Garry Neil Kennedy said of the work "Wieland managed to create a clever nationalist and feminist statement that disproved the belief that NSCAD was an American outpost producing art that was very un-Canadian in form and content." (Kennedy, xvii)

These works address our physical relation to works of art. The empathy for one body to another has the ability to give a viewer a physical reaction in a way that formal aesthetics alone cannot produce. These works can make us cringe or laugh but will almost always make us consider our own bodies in one way or another. Just how far we can push our physical limits and ourselves is a topic consistently explored by artists because of its power over most viewers. These works as a whole create a variety of sensations but one overall: that of the strength and versatility of our very own form.



Oh, Canada. Joyce Wieland, Lithograph, 1971

Thank you to Eleanor King, Melanie Colosimo and the
Anna Leonowens Gallery

Works Cited

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Kennedy, Garry Neill. The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968-1978. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2012. Print

Lavin, Kim "Yves Klein's Leap Year" Yves Klein's Leap Year. Art News Magazine, 01 Mar. 2010. Web. 06 July 2012. <<http://www.artnews.com/2010/03/01/yves-kliens-leap-year/>>.

Image on Front: *Stills From Aspen Project*. Dennis Oppenheim, Lithograph, 1971.

Images of *Reading Position*, *Trademarks*, *Oh, Canada* and *Stills from Aspen Project* courtesy of NSCAD University Permanent Collection.

Image of *Wedding* provided by Artist

The logo for NSCAD University, featuring the letters 'N·S·C·A·D' in a large, bold, serif font, with 'UNIVERSITY' in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font below it, all contained within a black rectangular background.

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