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Lifecasting & Ubiquitous Relationships

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Lifecasting
&
Ubiquitous Relationships

Senior Project Submitted to
The Arts Division
of Bard College

by
Alexis Williams

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Lifecasting and Ubiquitous Relationships

A Senior Thesis Artist Statement

Alexis Williams

May 2017

My subjects do not know I exist. They do not know who I am, and they do not know their lives are the center of my painting series. But I know them - at least, I think I do. My acrylic paintings depict people in domestic spaces in specific moments in time. The relationships of person-to-person, person to space, paint to canvas and voyeur to subject drives my obsession to watch and to paint what I see. What I am seeing are a collection of pixels that make up human forms, living rooms, and kitchens. These digital bodies move through the spaces 24 hours a day 7 days a week. They are the subjects of a lifecasting/livecasting webcam and they are the subjects of my work.

I have many insecurities, being watched by unknown onlookers is one of them. As I tighten my blinds I open my screen to “the private life of other people live 24/7” as the camsite reallifecam.com announces. They are people who are unafraid to display their most vulnerable moments to the world: women who proudly carry themselves fully exposed, couples who share deeply intimate moments on screen. They are regular people with regular banalities but their lives are broadcast for the world to watch and gaze upon. I am a viewer, a voyeur, a watcher, observer, obsesser, a painter, a surveiller; I am a female watching females. I am trying to understand my own insecurities. I am unpacking relationships - of people, things, space and passage of time, in the context of a webcam, and my relationship to them. I am painting to try to understand.

The webcam is cold. It is a dead eye, unmoving, unyielding, unrelenting. But what I am seeing is warm; it is intimate. It is a space that is secret and private and domestic and yet I am allowed to peer inside and spy. The webcam mediates intimacy and turns it cold and digitized. The scenes are broadcast over a flickering blue screen. I cannot touch the webcam subjects. I only know them as a series of pixels on my computer screen, though as I have watched them for the course of a year, I myself have developed a one-way-relationship with these subjects. I have come to recognize their habits, their schedules, what shows they like to watch, who usually makes dinner, what side of the couch they prefer. My subjects are simultaneously real and not real, nonfiction and fiction, present and past, alive and dead. The screen kills life through its mediation. I am attempting to revive life into the images by mediating them through paint.

The tension in the work is reflected in the tension of paint touching paint. I am taking a 2D digitized image and transforming it into physical, acrylic paint - full of textures, smells, and chemical compounds. This mode of transferring the physical human subjects to digital pixels to physical paint is an act of resurrection. The paint breathes life into these quiet captured moments. I am following the narrative of the subjects yet I am emphasizing the tension in the moment through color, texture, and paint next to paint. I am inventing the color, I am designing the scene, I am shifting light as I see fit to illuminate parts of time. I am the watcher, the mediator, the painter and I control the subjects in my work.

The female body draws viewership and the gaze; this is true in reallifecam.com and in classic paintings. Women historically have been placed in subjective roles for males to look at as beautiful objects - not as free agents. One of my favorite paintings is

Édouard Manet's, Olympia, 1863. The female subject is a prostitute. She is not ashamed or timid about her occupation or body. She challenges the viewer, the male gaze, and exhibits her agency as a woman. My final, most recent painting, directly references Manet. My female reallifecam subject is sitting on a couch in a similar position to Olympia. However, the reallifecam subject was not looking at the camera, as you rarely find the subjects looking into the webcam. I change the image and place my own face on the subject as I am staring directly at my viewer. This final painting sums up my body of work and addresses questions of voyeurism, ownership and agency of the female body and the relationship of viewer to subject.







A small white informational card or notice posted on the right wall, containing several lines of text.