

BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

Personal Private Public

Whether consciously or not, the viewer locks gazes with each of the magnetic works on the walls.

October 2019 | By Jennifer Rose Bonilla-Edgington

Although we're taught it's impolite, there is nonetheless something irresistible about eavesdropping, staring, or peering into people's everyday moments. So we mindlessly invite ourselves into the lives of others, the subjective spectacles and private experiences that are revealed in unrestricted moments. It is this phenomenon that concerns the ten artists currently sharing the third floor of Hauser & Wirth's gallery space. *Personal Public Private* is a group exhibition—including photography, painting, and collage—that is threaded together by the conception of intimate personal space as observed through the act of voyeurism. Whether consciously or not, the viewer locks gazes with each of the magnetic works on the walls.



B. Ingrid Olson, *Given: illuminated from reverse, their roof, behind curtain*, 2019. Inkjet print and UV printed matboard in aluminum frame. 30 x 20 1/4 inches. © B. Ingrid Olson. Courtesy the artist and Simone Subal Gallery.

Whether consciously or not, the viewer locks gazes with each of the magnetic works on the walls.

Upon entering the show, the viewer is confronted by a self-portrait of Paul McCarthy, titled *Veil* (1970). McCarthy is standing in the middle of a room, veiled by fabric. Under this veil is his camera: he is photographing himself in a mirror. This image deals with the relationship between privacy and exposure. By covering himself and the camera McCarthy produces a representation of himself, but one that cannot be seen completely. He is in control of his image, and presents himself as vulnerable even while restricting access to his being. Ingrid Olson explores similar ideas in a piece titled *Given: illuminated from reverse, their roof, behind curtain* (2019). Like McCarthy's photograph, this work is a self-portrait. However, here the artist appears nearly nude. Olson is wearing only thigh high stockings, and lays on her

Simone Subal Gallery

back, feet extended towards a mirror in which the flash of her camera is visible. Although McCarthy's image is subdued and Olson's is sexual in tone, they nonetheless highlight a similar combination of vulnerability and self-containment. Just as McCarthy's face was blanketed by his cloak, Olson's position doesn't reveal her face, and only parts of her breasts are visible. Only parts of the artist are left exposed to view.

Kohei Yoshiyuki's photographs are the complete opposite of McCarthy's and Olson's staged self-portraits. In his series *The Park* (1979), Yoshiyuki peers into other people's intimate sexual moments. The subjects of this series are anonymous men and women who gather after dark to explore their sexuality in a public park. As Yoshiyuki captured these encounters on film, he also found himself focusing on other voyeurs looking on. The work became a threefold situation: Yoshiyuki watched the voyeurs just as the voyeurs watched the sexual acts of others. This is a series that explores the reciprocal cause-and-effect relationship between viewer and viewed. Both McCarthy and Olson captured blanketed, hidden images of private space that were nonetheless intended to be viewed, while Yoshiyuki, with a flash of his camera, suggests that personal, private, and public spaces of experience are, in fact, one and the same.

Other artists in the show make direct reference to the conventions of portrait photography. Paul Mpagi Sepuya, for example, photographs himself and his friends in a staged scenario that includes backdrops and lighting that recall a portrait studio. Like Olsen, he uses mirrors to have full control of what is displayed for the viewer. His fragmented images withhold the unity of his subjects, provoking the viewer's desire to see more than what is given. We become observers of moments created with such care and privacy that it seems discourteous for us to intrude.

Ceila Hempton's *Self Portrait, 2nd January 2019* (2019), is a painted image of a vagina, a representation of female anonymity painted with hues of blue oil pigment. Hempton's painting is another example of an artist intimately showing a part of one's self while maintaining enough control to conceal their complete identity. A large painting by Mira Schor titled *Dicks, or the Impregnation of the Universe* (1988) stands alone on its own wall. It encourages you to feel small and inferior to what is in front of you: the penis is staged as a representation of patriarchal power. While Hempton uses an image of genitalia to reflect on her own self-image, here Schor makes her depiction work as a critique of male-dominated society, an impression reinforced by the title's reference to universal control.

Hauser & Wirth's show is based on sexual desires, staged moments of vulnerability, a search for reflection, a desperation for privacy, and a humanistic fascination with exploration of the self. As I walked through the space, moving in and out of each room, I felt more and more like a voyeur myself. Bending forward, close as I could get, looking for details, facial expressions, hints and clues in all the works in front of me. As other visitors took pictures of the pieces on view, posing next to genitalia and various sexual scenarios, suddenly I was the one peering into a private or personal moment that is nonetheless staged in public, as an invitation to observe.