

The Glass Box Gallery



February 2, 2016February 4, 2016

Always a Body: Interview with Theresa Knopf, Geneva Costa, and Sichong Xie

Always A Body features the work of nine Southern California artists, all currently working towards their MA or MFA. To learn more about the artists in this exhibition, we asked them a series of questions – questions we ask ourselves in the studio, about our work, our relationships, and our bodies. We're excited to share their responses with you.

– *Emily Baker and Vanesa Gingold*



Theresa Knopf, *Quiet Reserve*, 2015, mixed media

California State University, Northridge

Theresa Knopf

How would you describe your relationship to your body? How are you “Always a Body”? How do you use or work through your body in your artistic practice?

Our bodies are the physical vessels that hold the entirety of our experiences. Those experiences don't always manifest outwardly onto our bodies, but what if they did? It's this idea of concealing and restraining beneath the flesh that I find most interesting, and try to address in my work.

The art making process for me is a physical experience. Whether I am painting, printmaking, or doing needlework. I use my body to physically create elements that are then combined to make mixed media works of art.

Considering the body and your current focus, do personal or artistic rituals play a role in your practice?

Studio rituals are important. I like to make myself a hot cup of tea when I work. Not only does this nurture my physical body, but it also is a built in moment to rest and reflect on the project throughout the process, otherwise I end up with a cold cup of tea!

What is your most important tool? Is there something you can't live without in your studio?

I always keep a travel watercolor set with me, and a yogurt container of gouache. No matter what form my finalized artwork becomes, I always begin with watercolor or gouache on paper. When my mind is cluttered or I've hit a studio problem, I will bring out my paints and paper and just make marks. This act of painting without constraint allows me to declutter my mind and to meditate on my art practice.

... and my electric kettle.

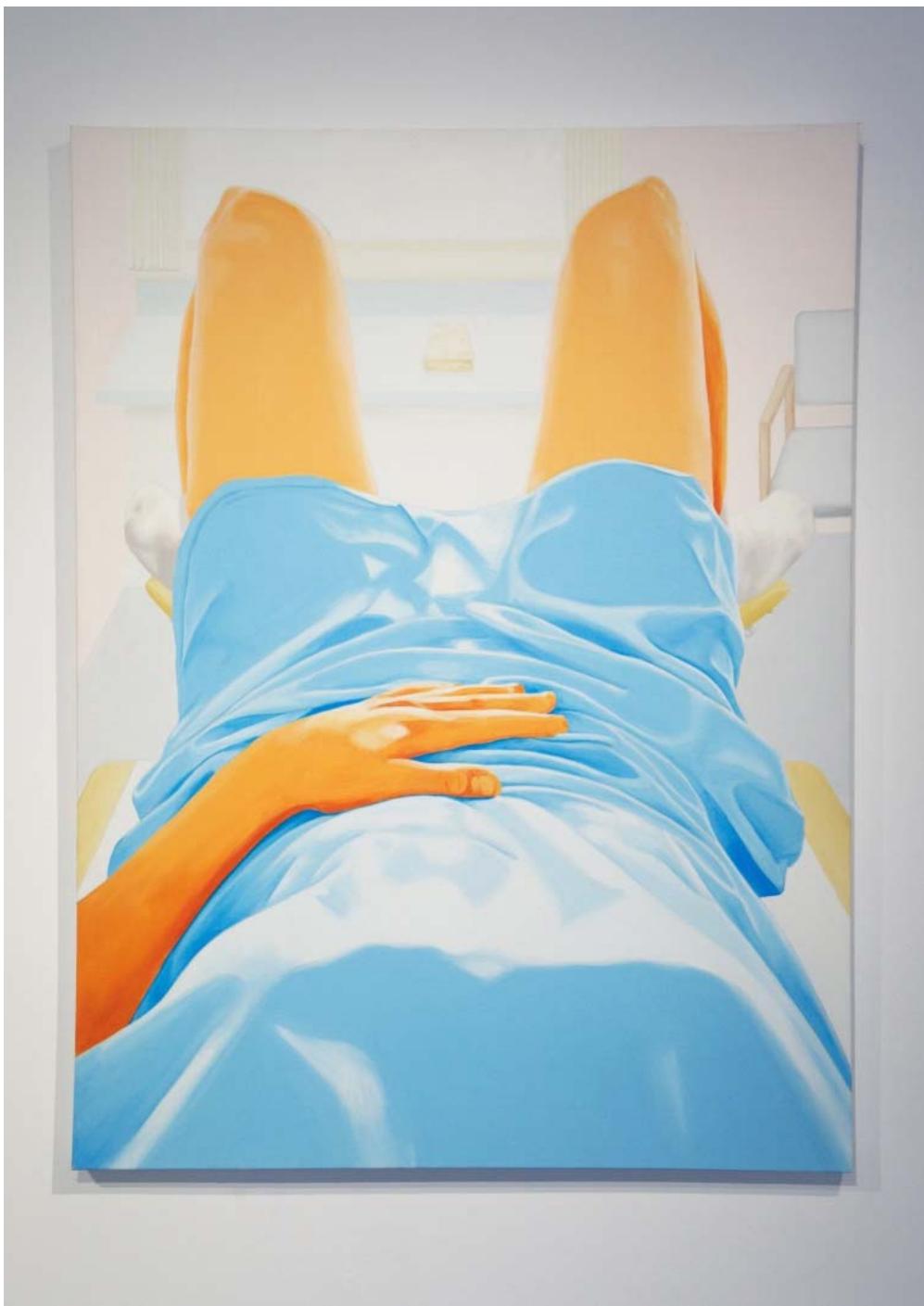
Who inspires your work? Who keeps you going? Which artists, musicians, thinkers, or other important people in your life do you turn to?

My grandmother has always been a huge inspiration. She has given me unwavering support no matter what path I chose to take. She introduced me to domestic arts, libraries, theater, music, dance, and feminism. It completely shaped me into the woman I am today.

For matters of visual arts, I turn to my dear friend and studio mate, Ashley Mistriel. In the studio we critique each other's work and bounce ideas around. Outside of the studio, we paint in coffee shops and hold drawing clubs with other artist friends. Both of us are committed to creating community.

Is it ever possible to transcend the body?

There are definitely moments when one feels that they have transcended the body, through art or meditation, but I find that movement of the body and physical exertion used when making art is equally important. I need a combination of both mental transcendence and physicality to keep balance.



Geneva Costa, *The Clinic*, 2015, oil on canvas

California State University, Northridge

Geneva Costa

How would you describe your relationship to your body? How are you “Always a Body”? How do you use or work through your body in your artistic practice?

The majority of my work is autobiographical, whether directly or indirectly. Many of my works concern portrayals of the female body and its relationship to a greater sociopolitical narrative.

What is your most important tool? Is there something you can't live without in your studio?

My studio is incomplete without additional creative inspiration to work by; I often listen to music or even television series and movies while creating. I find I am not able to work in silence, and am inspired by others' creations while I, myself, create. That, and good lighting is a must.

Who inspires your work? Who keeps you going? Which artists, musicians, thinkers, or other important people in your life do you turn to?

Strong women inspire my work, and my mother, even after her passing, is who keeps me going. She sacrificed for me to have a strong arts education, and I will not let that be in vain. She is my ultimate inspiration and I am proud to have had such a strong supporter in my corner throughout my life.

Is it ever possible to transcend the body?

Of course it is possible to transcend the body, but I must ask myself, why? Why not embrace what I am most drawn to, the figure. Sometimes one must ask herself if it is possible to do something, and if the answer is yes, pose the next question: should I?



Sichong Xie, *You Can't Take That Away From Me*, 2015, digital c-print

California Institute of the Arts

Sichong Xie

How would you describe your relationship to your body? How are you "Always a Body"? How do you use or work through your body in your artistic practice?

My practice deals with issues of identity, politics, cross-culturalism, and the surreal characteristics of my body in the ever – changing environment. My performances isolate my persona as a female in China within extreme natural landscapes such as the Qing Ling Mountain and the Qin Shi Huang mausoleum.

Considering the body and your current focus, do personal or artistic rituals play a role in your practice?

My current body of work explores Chinese culture versus American culture, my female gender versus the patriarchy that is reflected in municipal sculptures in China, and Chinese Communist politics versus the "only one child" generations. The cultures newly explored in my work are the pre-history Communist culture in China and the culture of technological innovation and its interaction with its surroundings

What is your most important tool? Is there something you can't live without in your studio?

Humor is my most important tool. However, I want people to realize the serious problems behind the absurdity. I seek to be a cultural organizer who utilizes body based sculptural forms (mask/costume/object) and transforms discarded materials and disregarded spaces by using the tools of humor and absurdity. My practice, which is founded in the brief interconnectedness of all things, explores universal questions at the intersection of the cosmos, life, death, reality, spirituality and technology.

Who inspires your work? Who keeps you going? Which artists, musicians, thinkers, or other important people in your life do you turn to?

Ai Wei Wei is my favorite artist. His artwork "Coca Cola" explains the difference between ancient culture and pop culture, old pottery and a new popular brand, as well as Chinese history and new global world. It's funny when you first look at Ai Wei Wei's work, but after a while, you will feel sad because human beings now are destroying their ancestor's masterwork and history.

Is it ever possible to transcend the body?

The personal becomes political. Cultural background has had a big role in my life and artworks; I have no choice but to include the political elements in my work. To reflect the patriarchal society in China, I imitate historical monuments, such as statues of Chairman Mao, while taking multiple photos of myself jumping in the air. I want to make something absurd in order to question reality: which is more real, the fake Louis Vuitton outfit with communist male attire, or the person jumping?

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