

EMBARRASSMENT 1: VULNERABILITY

Gallery KM is pleased to present EMBARRASSMENT 1: VULNERABILITY, the first show in a two-part series featuring work by Michael Dopp, Liz Glynn, Peter Holzhauer, Whitney Hubbs, Laura Kim, Juliana Romano, Frank Ryan (in collaboration with Justin Cole), Lily Simonson, Caleb Waldorf, and Jessica Williams. The second part of the series is entitled EMBARRASSMENT 2: THEORY, and will feature work by the same artists. All artists in the exhibition live and work in Los Angeles.

Embarrassment takes place when ego meets audience and falls a little short. It is an emotional experience that occurs when there is a mismatch between our expectation and our action, between our action and the social reception of that action. Embarrassment is ubiquitous, often mean, heartbreaking, funny, and/or extremely awkward. Unlike shame, it cannot function easily as a solitary internal experience, but is instead defined primarily in relation to an “other.” In this dependence upon an outside audience, we can see the experience of embarrassment as a potential location for the recognition of difference; it is a space in which the habitual flow of the social script breaks down and we recognize, if only in a slightly conscious way, that we exist as separate and apart.

EMBARRASSMENT 1: VULNERABILITY explores the experience of such recognition—of difference, of solitude, of otherness—as well as the desire for connection, the desire to overcome that divide between self and other. This is a show about the space between: between self and other, childhood and adulthood, material and immaterial, kiss and completion, communication and reception, external and internal, past and present, birth and death, and artist and audience. In this sense, the exhibition is extremely broad in scope, and yet the artists have chosen small moments that lock us into the experience of being caught in transition in very specific, concrete ways.

The work in the show moves from overt moments of exposure, such as Frank Ryan’s lovingly articulated portrait of an erect penis—painted just sweetly enough to invite us to look a little longer and face our fear of being caught—to more angled contemplations of the space between light and materiality in Laura Kim’s slide projections. Created by running a sewing machine directly through slide film, Kim’s projections manage to convey a kind of quiet dissolution and penetration of internal/external boundaries, with the observer positioned as if behind a dark object that is slowly being perforated by light. Ryan’s work on paper in collaboration with Justin Cole also plays with the border between positive and negative, in abstracted monotype torsos in which we suddenly become uncomfortably aware of our own physical body when we recognize that the tactile texture of the torso is created through the impression left by actual body hair.

Michael Dopp’s two-sided painting on fabric, “Double Anemic Painting,” similarly offers us an experience of self-consciousness, though in this instance it is an offering that implies a potential action on our part. With distinct geometrical patterns on each side of the fabric, and only one side on view per day (the painting is flipped each morning) the piece hangs down from the two tacks holding it to the wall and dares us to give in to our curiosity and peak at the other side—without offering us any clear way of doing so. Accordingly, it speaks both to the dual nature of the divide between embarrassed self and other, and to the potentially false divide between artist/art object and viewer.

Other artists in the exhibit show us narrative moments in which individuals on the verge illustrate the risk and exhilaration potential in any transition. A black and white photograph by Whitney Hubbs portrays a young man on the cusp of adulthood, standing in an enclosed fence and holding a lasso with a stance and grip so tentative that we are left unsure whether it is he or the unseen animal on the other end of the rope that retains control of the interaction. Juliana

Romano's sensitively explored paintings from found photographs also show us figures in moments of adolescence that read as both narratively and physically vulnerable. Here, we see compelling edges of exposed surface sit against quick paint strokes in an overall composition that recalls the frightening stillness we feel just before our next personal narrative begins. Lily Simonson's paintings of semi-terrestrial creatures, on the other hand, confront us with the other side of the divide; we find ourselves at the crux of a momentous happening, in a hazy world of creatures we don't entirely understand, as they begin to have sex, or lie prone after giving birth to a multitude of powerful and practically bursting fish eggs. In these scenes, Simonson reflects our awkward relation to desire and the boundaries of sexuality, reproduction, birth and death.

Jessica Williams' pieces, painted from specific memories that have resurfaced frequently in her mind over time, present snapshot vistas in which we find ourselves observing a concrete instant in time from something of a removed distance. The fact that the subject matter belies emotional distance—a large painting of a naked woman on her back in a pool under the starry sky in "Night Swimming", and a rough image of a casket in "Funeral #2"—underscores the tricky balance of subjectivity and objectivity, even in relation to our own memories. Here, the risks of exposure (both physical and emotional) meet the frightening result of observer impartiality, which in its own way can be more devastating than disapproval or disdain.

In the midst of all of these scenes that either transport us to—or narratively recall—an awkward state of otherness, Peter Holzhauer's photograph of a field of California wild flowers in the Spring comes as something of a relief. With a vista that is nearly blushing with floral virility and stunning topographical clarity, Holzhauer's "Hilltop" offers up a subject that is literally vulnerable, while allowing us the space to enjoy a scene that should be somehow embarrassing (or at the very least, perhaps not entirely taken seriously), but here manages to successfully withstand that vulnerability and hold its ground.

Finally, Liz Glynn and Caleb Waldorf round out the show by giving us the gift of a print object, an element that we can move through at our own pace, and hold in our hands. This allows us, at least momentarily, to reclaim our sense of agency. With contributions from a variety of artists and writers, the content of the book, however, may challenge that confident remove. Taking the same title as the exhibition, Glynn and Waldorf's *Embarrassment: Vulnerability* is a collection of pieces that focus on anecdotal evidence, experience, and observations of specific material conditions of vulnerability. Submissions approach vulnerability as both a purely negative condition as well as a more active, affirmative position. As we move through the comforting and familiar serial format, we encounter words and pictures that require our reentry into a state of disconcerting observation, in which we read and view experiences that are awkward, uncomfortable, and often funny.

EMBARRASSMENT 2: THEORY will directly follow Part 1, and will approach the experience of embarrassment as a potential site for active narrative construction, group transformation, and humor.