

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS



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B. Ingrid Olson, *Run-on, fold and split*, 2019–20, ink-jet print, UV-printed mat board, powder-coated aluminum frame, 24 × 16".

B. Ingrid Olson

CARPENTER CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

B. Ingrid Olson's concurrent exhibitions, "History Mother" and "Little Sister," draw us into a consideration of the intersecting and meandering temporalities of fashioning a life and making art. Olson's works derive their power from being insistently liminal, operating somewhere between bodies, mediums, and moments in time. It is precisely this slipperiness that yields subtle yet incisive feminist critique.

Olson introduces these preoccupations in *Proto Coda, Index*, 2016–22, a sculptural installation and mini retrospective of sorts. Three perpendicularly conjoined walls function as supports for replicas of every sculptural relief Olson has made over the past six years. The works index body parts that have been geometrically abstracted and hung at the height of either the corresponding body part of their installer or that of the artist herself. The work alludes to specific anatomies and distinct moments in time, but makes them difficult to perceive precisely; clues about their gender, for example, are conspicuously absent. While its sculptural traces evoke the past, its fiberboard material and iterative logic suggest open-endedness—a past that can be endlessly revisited, supplemented, and altered.

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Proto Coda, Index also introduces the retrospection at the heart of “History Mother,” installed in the adjacent gallery. Here, photographs feature the artist’s body defamiliarized—pressed, doubled, covered up, refracted, and blurred—through the staging and manipulation of props and multiple, often overlaid prints. Olson organizes the pictures around an image that remains stubbornly incomprehensible. At the center of *Calendar, 2020–21*, arms and legs extend from under a vertical sheet of white paper blanketing the torso beneath it. At the midpoint of *Run-on, fold and split, 2019–20*, we encounter the gap between the heel of a foot and the shadow of a corporeal bend—an inscrutable void between floating limbs. Many of these interior shots are framed by ink-jet-printed mat boards, creating a sense of layered depth that pulls us in. And yet the interplay of materiality and flatness among the competing prints also repels us, reminding us of the composite work’s status as a three-dimensional object placed on the wall. By identifying these works with multiple dates, Olson signals the temporal lag built into their making: One year might reference the date on which she captured a component image, while another registers the moment in which the final work was conceived.

If in “History Mother” Olson asks what it means to look back at (or peer into) her own body of work, in “Little Sister” she refracts such questions into architecture by examining the building in which the shows appear. Designed by Le Corbusier, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts is an imposing modernist edifice. Works such as *Why does my vestibule hurt?, 2020–22*, playfully imagine the ways a building might reflect or behave like a body, while also imagining how it determines our own embodied experience of the site. Here, a scaffold-like structure of metal armatures and plywood walls recasts the space as a threatening internal chamber and configures the viewer as an intrusive voyeur. *White Wall, painted for Gray, 2022*, is a clever and aggressive response to Le Corbusier’s 1938 defacement and overpainting of the white walls of *E-1027*, architect and designer Eileen Gray’s modernist villa on the French Riviera. Out of allegiance to Gray, Olson repainted a wall that Le Corbusier had stipulated be colored red, obscuring it in subtle gradations of white. Though this work risks being simply an elegant recuperative gesture, the retaliatory mural quietly signals Olson’s alignment with Gray’s mode of making, namely, her careful attunement to and calibration of light and space.

This mode is best reflected in the undated installation *What I would be if I wasn’t what I am*. Olson obtained 1930s powder-coated steel light fixtures she discovered while working in the Art Institute of Chicago’s Ryerson and Burnham Libraries and installed them throughout the Carpenter’s first-floor gallery and outer grounds. While their petallike wings might seem needlessly ornamental, they are functionally designed to brighten the shelves while shielding visitors from glare as they move through the aisles. The work proposes grafting “archives” onto the modernist monument, the decorative onto the abstract, and the feminine onto the masculine. Olson appends Le Corbusier’s cool concrete with the glow of projected light, an arsenal of found apertures that both guide and scramble how we look at an artist’s career, the historical past, and maybe even ourselves.

—*Jenny Harris*