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DOUBLE-ENDED ARROW

March 3, 2015

B. Ingrid Olson's *double-ended arrow* at Simone Subal Gallery, New York

by *Lucas Blalock*



Olson's exhibition title brings to mind a conversation I had recently about the way mirrors work and why it is that they flip us right to left but not top to bottom. The answer is that they don't flip us right to left at all, at least not in the way a lens does, but instead pull the world in front of them inside-out, using their own plane as the axis. An arrow provides a useful visual example of this. An arrow pointing at a mirror of course points the other way in its reflection, and it in its exploration of these related correspondences that Olson's presentation is most exciting.



the fountain containing itself, virtual fold, 2014, inkjet print and UV inkjet printed matboard in aluminum frame, 17" x 12"

The show begins with an architectural intervention, a kind of corridor that keeps you from surveying the room until you're already inside. This conceit is part and parcel of Olson's greater oeuvre and works well to establish a relationship between the framing device and the body, a problem worked and re-worked throughout the pieces on view. This corridor pushes you from the gallery's door towards a small sculptural work hanging on the wall, one of several in the show, which either hang like tiny paintings or are arranged on shelf-like pedestals, and resemble cast bodies both industrial and human. While these works are elegant, they don't invite the complexity of relationships laid bare by the photographic pieces with which they share the space.

The works in this second category are less properly photographs than they are fashioned of photographic elements. Yet Olson is unafraid to use the qualities of photographic space: perspective, focus (or a lack thereof), a sense of light, and the truncations of framing all work towards the realisation of these pieces. In *the fountain containing itself, virtual fold* (2014), the artist's legs are pictured in two

nearly opposite perspectives, with one inlaid in the centre of the other. The effect is something like a faceted mirror, but more pressingly, it is a description of a body, the artist's own, personal in its treatment and yet groundless. This is not 'the groundlessness of the image' attributed to the digital age – pictures and their elements free-floating in loose, temporary associations – but instead, something more vertiginous in which one still feels the draw of gravity.

Olsen accomplishes this effect with a great deal of deliberateness and precision, though her material choices and subjects combine in an aesthetic that can feel at times overly familiar. Feminist performance of the 1970s and photographic work like that of Brigit Jurgenssen come to mind, as do Jurgenssen's contemporaries such as Michael Snow and Dan Graham.

But this said, Olson's endeavors also feel quite timely, particularly in the way they engage the body through a medium that has been literally disembodied by its digital turn. Refreshingly, she is approaching this not only through the production of the object – though that is at work here as well – but through a wry pictorial intelligence. Seen in this light, one could say that her pictures are addressed to the nervous system, where the image of our time is more purely cognition: in front of the body as opposed to already behind one's eyes. In these works, the powerful proposition of our bodies attempting to mirror Olsen's invoke a truly imaginative space and a structural complexity. This locates the viewer in relation to the artist, the body and the picture.





axiomatic, fingered and bent, 2014, dye-sublimation print on aluminum, c-prints, found metal objects, aluminum, acrylic, plexiglas frame, 22" x 34" x 2 1/4"

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