

**new
visions**

**why
photography**

*In all apparatuses (including the camera) thinking in numbers overrides linear, historical thinking.
– Vilém Flusser, 1983*

B. Ingrid Olson (b. 1987, USA) lives and works in Chicago. She graduated with a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010. Recent exhibitions include *Fingered Eyed*, i8 Gallery, Reykjavik (2019), *Lost Without Your Rhythm*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (2018–2019), *Forehead and Brain*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (2018), *Klein/Olson*, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (2017), and *Being: New Photography 2018*, MoMA, New York.

In your works the interplay between the figurative and the abstract seems to be a recurring element, and you talk about location and dislocation in the way you use space. Can you elaborate on how these elements relate to your work?

The concept of camouflage is a link between these sets of ideas—figuration versus abstraction and location versus dislocation. In the act of camouflaging, the subject is present but not always available to be seen immediately, nor in its entirety. The subject becomes partially absent. I think about this in terms of both abstraction and dislocation. There is a distancing, an act of removal. There is a certain charge, a power dynamic to how and when the presence of a camouflaged subject is revealed—whether that subject is a person, animal or something else. Abstraction occurs in the scrambling of visual information; the regular and the continuous can become flattened, doubled, fragmented or folded-together. In my work, there is often a

play, or a synthesis that occurs between figure and ground, making a hybrid between architecture, pictorial space and the body. These manipulations destabilize the orientation and relationship between figure and ground, creating disruptions or confusions between the body and its location.

Your use of the body in your work creates a very intimate visual experience, almost private. When did you start using the body in your work and what are your intentions and thoughts behind it?

I think of my photographic works as offering an invitation to share my vantage-point: to see down onto my body as I would with my own eyes, or to look at a very proximate and mirrored image of my body. I became interested in photography after I left school, so rather late. My first impression of using a point-and-shoot film camera—the small lightweight plastic pressed to my cheek, the viewfinder directly in front of my eye—was

that the photographic image could be a stand-in for my own vision and therefore it immediately implicated my body behind the camera. Of course this is a simple idea, or at least an obvious one, but it has proven to be very generative for me. At the same time—even though it is my body pictured in the images—I don't think about the works as self-portraits. Rather, I am thinking about my own body as a building material, or as a vehicle for the viewer. I wouldn't say the images become participatory, per se, but the operation of the first-person perspective within the images rhymes with, reiterates or even coopts a viewer's own vision and so creates the possibility for an empathetic relationship between our bodies.

You talk about choreography and time in relation to your sculptures. Is there a similar relationship to the photographs?

Taking a photograph of a body moving in space is a way of suspending or halting time, creating a pinpoint within a moving continuum. Some of my photographic works fit this more traditional idea of capturing images in a more evidential, separative mode. Looking at a photograph, there is a distance between the viewer and the photographic depiction, the "afterwards" of a situation, a kind of static past tense. In other instances, my photographic works have a more self-reflexive relationship with the viewer's act of looking—the first-person perspective I brought up before. When paired with deep perimeter frames that jut out from the wall and draw the viewer in, these works elicit a more bodily response, as an inclusion into the present tense and an opportunity for enaction—more proprioceptive than cognitive. The sculptural presence of these photographic works ties them more concretely to the present moment, to whole-bodied seeing, and to the choreography of moving in front of and around objects.

Your photographic works are all unique and not in editions. Is that a conscious decision or is it a result of the process of making them?

If I want to use a gesture again, I take a new photograph rather than reprinting the same image. Each image captures a gesture or situation within a cumulative, developing language that is both reified and complicated with each re-staging.

You operate both behind and in front of the camera in your works. What is the main difference between these two roles and how do they interact?

The difference between my location in relationship to the camera lens—in front of or behind—can be essentialized as *looking* versus *seeing*. Looking at something is a conscious act, it is directed, cognitive, and often involves some degree of explication, or evaluation of whatever is in front of you. Conversely, the sensation of sight is often subconscious, sometimes unfocused, and is an automatic experience as a sighted person with eyes open. Often times in my work, I am attempting to picture both looking and seeing, simultaneously within one image.

Why photography?

Because there is no better way to tell the truth and a lie at the same time.