

fits of the three performers – long dresses of white chiffon, lace trim and colourful, patterned overlays – looked as though the maid from Manet's *Olympia* had walked out of the painting to style a collection with Rihanna, thereby recasting herself as a central character rather than peripheral object.

The anachronistic aspects of the installation bridged a history of politicized representations with contemporary concerns. It's worth mentioning the MoMA's proximity to Trump Tower, only a few blocks away. When Junglepussy's backup dancers waved signs emblazoned with the lyrics "this pussy don't pop for you," it could have been a direct address to the current US administration. The shadow of Trump Tower lent the evening a sense of urgency, a reminder that the critiques raised by *In Search of Us* are of particular importance in a political climate in which state policies on health care, immigration, the economy and the environment continue to disproportionately jeopardize the lives and humanity of women and queer people of colour.

The three performers, all women of colour, appeared to perform to and for each other rather than for the audience. They sat down, they talked to one another, they looked at their phones. The parameters around the piece – the raised and therefore distanced installation, the capped audience size (tickets for the event sold out), as well as its one-night-only ephemerality – gave the performers an agency that otherwise may have been lost in the eyes of an infinite and unknowable public. These boundaries made it clear that the performers were not present to be gawked at — or to serve. Their only obligation was to feel themselves, and they were generous enough to share those feelings with us in the audience. Our obligation in turn became to recognize that generosity and mirror it, to give them back that respect. In her essay, O'Grady writes, "...self-expression is not a stage that can be bypassed. It is a discrete moment that must precede or occur simultaneously with the deconstructive act."² By undoing the figure of Olympia's subservient and peripheral maid, *In Search of Us* planted seeds for new modes of self-understanding. As the title of the show suggests, this search for selfhood is ongoing.

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Chris Curreri: *Unruly Matter*
Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto
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by Elora Crawford

There are so many ways to touch, I am reminded as I move through the rooms of Daniel Faria Gallery on the occasion of *Unruly Matter*, the so-titled solo exhibition of works by Chris Curreri. A series of polished brown, slick-looking ceramics slouch and collapse into their fixity on plinths upholstered with fine white linen canvas. *Sixes and Sevens*, a series of new sculptures, moves me in a way I struggle to locate. The sizes and shapes appear at once mechanical and human. Like fittings for soldered joints, "elbows" and "nipples" – names sourced and gendered from parts of the body – the engorged, deflating boulders approximate something intestinal or testicular, like sleepy stomachs or flaccid penises. Their height reaches my navel. I crouch to attend them closely, my gaze a sort of graze.

Surrounding them, printed monochromatic photographs no bigger than the size of my open hand punctuate the tall walls with moments of flesh falling into flesh, the embrace of two masculine faces pressed into what could be just one feminine form. Kiss Portfolio – eight silver gelatin prints with sharp facial hair piercing skin, wet lips and tongues, a fin-

ger slipped in – is rinsed with a cool eroticism. Its prickly, wet textures feel close enough to touch, and I am reminded of what film theorist Laura Marks has called “haptic visuality” – a term she employs to describe the kind of seeing that involves memory, senses of touch and of smell.¹ Convincingly, she suggests that film is a kind of skin. The skin extends itself to the viewer, with scars and defects, offering itself for inspection or comparison. Touching, in the history of looking at photographs, also recalls Barthes’ punctum, that abstract element of an image that emerges to strike something familiar, internal, a tremble of resemblance outside the reach of words; “that accident which pricks, bruises me.”²

Curreri’s photographs are as touching, physically, in the event of their capture, as they are touching, provoking a physical reaction as I linger over them. Still, the formal abstraction works to maintain a certain distance. A queered Ed Weston *Pepper*. In each image, the two faces combine to mimic the folds of the ceramics, like the optical illusion of two line-drawn profiles interpreted otherwise as a vase. Indeed, so much of Curreri’s body of work brings to mind the ways in which clay behaves like flesh. His image series *Virginia*, large-scale photographs of cave interiors from 2013, read like stills from an endoscopy exam, the pictured monochromatic hallows remarkably similar to cavernous esophageal walls. *Puppet*, his 2008 image series shows a nude man arranging himself around a red, bottlenecked vase. He wears the vase on his body in different contortions, on his leg, on his genitals and above his neck. Curreri’s work in a recent group show at Scrap Metal, *Proud Flesh and Vase Collection* (ongoing), was an evolution of this comparison; found red glassware and a red, mouth-like cavity centred in a cast cube of cement. *Unruly Matter* is a material consideration of this relationship, between bodies and sculptures (or sculptural media), informed by his training as a darkroom photographer.

In the second room of the gallery, *Seem*, a 12” x 12” gelatin silver print much larger than those of *Kiss Portfolio*, occupies a wall of its own. On the surface of the upside-down image, the curve of two noses meets the bowl of the eyebrow bone and the eyes of two different men stare at the lens, and the eventual

viewer. A black line, a seam, maintains a separation between their faces.

With touching, there is an undeniable intimacy and an ever-present impossibility. Touch contends with the physical truth that two things can never truly touch, a swooping asymptote, the space between atoms of things can only become infinitesimally close. Touch, instead, is a kind of reaction of proximity. The gelatin silver print is made when paper sensitized with silver salts is exposed to the variances of light that a scene visibly casts. The latent image is then developed and fixed, like the firing of ceramic clay in a kiln, by a chemical solution in the darkroom. Both, a document of touch fixed in time.

In the small back room, a third photographic work, *Lifecast*, fills a room of its own. It feels different; its touch is different. The plaster bust of a young boy, his eyes closed as in sleep or in death, is cradled by gloved hands whose beholden arms extend beyond the frame. A tumour on the boy’s neck bends his head under its weight. This work’s sensitivity is distinct from the others in the exhibition, the body is weighed differently, against the tenderness of grief, that which sensitizes the neck, the shoulders and the hands. *Lifecast* is the only photograph of a clay object exhibited, and draws upon previous works like *Corpus*, which pictures the head of Christ-like figure cradled on conservationist’s foam, its unknowable weight pressed into it. Curreri has been cited for his subtle use of solarization, a developing-out process that inverts the negative and positive tones in the image. In the darkroom, he treats the image like clay, working to draw out the latent object from somewhere within the material. With such care, he achieves a specific tone, texture or tooth. Varied pressure pushes different marks into clay. Touch has different textures. Surfaces are malleable until fixed (a mechanical-like tick line ladders the surface of the ceramic protrusions). There are so many ways to touch.

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¹ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Inter-cultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 27.

Installation view of
Chris Curreri at Daniel
Faria Gallery, 2017.
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