

Suzy Lake: Political Poetics

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Suzy Lake, *Extended Breathing: Under Porchlight*, 2009. Courtesy Paul Petro Contemporary Art.

Feminist art has been given welcome attention in recent years with major survey shows like [“WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution”](#) and the opening of centres dedicated to feminist art at home and abroad, such as the [Feminist Art Gallery](#) in Toronto and the [Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art](#) in Brooklyn. So it was with great delight that I found one of the main exhibitions for this year’s [Contact Photography Festival](#) focused on the development of a shaping figure in the dialogue of feminist art, [Suzy Lake](#).

“Suzy Lake: Political Poetics” began with *Extended Breathing*, a photographic series of long exposures. In each lightbox, a crisp and still background is contrasted with what at first appears to be an out-of-focus figure. For each of the works, the artist stood still for the duration of the exposure, her camera recording the subtle

movements that would not be evident in a snapshot or similarly brief glance. Through this limiting performance, the physicality of the artist's identity begins to fade as she is consumed by her surroundings, raising questions of the erasure of oneself through social(ized) identity.

In *Reduced Performing*, another recent series, the artist used a large flatbed scanner to record a detailed full-length image of herself. Compared to *Extended Breathing*, Lake's identity is startlingly more articulated in this life-sized documentation. Yet these scans do not tell us anything definitive beyond her appearance. Although the viewer meets the artist face to face, the question of qualifying attributes of identity can only be based on superficial details.



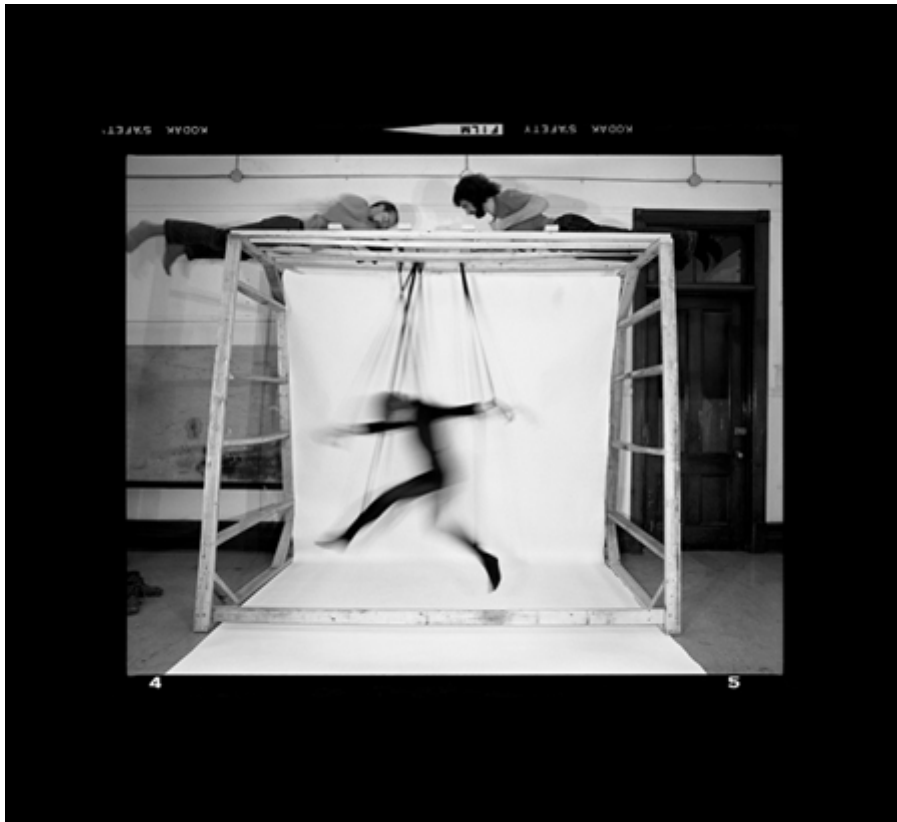


Suzy Lake *Reduced Performing: Blinking and Breathing #1* 2009
Courtesy Galerie Donald Browne

Extended Breathing and *Reduced Performing* incorporate Lake's long-standing exploration of female identity and performativity; "Political Poetics" footnoted these newer series with the inclusion of a number of early works that reinforced this theme. The ability for the viewer to see works from earlier in Lake's career, such as the 1970s-era *On Stage* and *Box Concert*, underlined the evolution of Lake's exploration of femininity and identity through several waves of feminism.

Through her personal exploration of her own relation to gender, Lake allows the viewer to be pensive and self-reflective. It's an effect many are likely to enjoy as "Suzy Lake: Political Poetics" tours in future to the [McIntosh Gallery](#) at the University of Western Ontario in London, the [Macdonald Stewart Art Centre](#) at the University of Guelph, [Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery](#) in Halifax and the [Art Gallery of Peterborough](#).

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Suzy Lake *Choreographed Puppet #4-5* 1976 Courtesy Paul Petro Contemporary Art