

photographic process, the surface of the sitter's body was carefully mapped over a three-hour period, documented by hundreds of digital snapshots taken across 360 degrees. The resulting composite image required a lengthy process of reassembly, long after his uncle had left the studio. Close attention to the fragment-images of the sitter determined the nature of the portrait that emerged. Conducted "in complicity" with his uncle, Dufaux's hyper-panoptic portrait can be seen as the materialization of the artist's empathic act of looking.

It is with a similarly attentive gaze that viewers are invited to contemplate *Auto/Pathographies*.

Auto/Pathographies

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curator

Through the media of photography, performance, installation and video, the group exhibition *Auto/Pathographies* addresses questions of identity and (self-)representation in the face of illness. Bringing together works from 10 artists based in Canada, the U.S., the U.K. and Austria produced from the 1990s until today, the exhibition offers both sensitive and critical perspectives on the roles played by disease in redefining individual existences and interpersonal relations.

Amongst these works are a number of rare images from the **Jo Spence Memorial Archive**. Earlier this year, Spence was the subject of two retrospectives in London to mark the 20th anniversary of her death. *Auto/Pathographies* features Spence's photographic explorations of mortality from her series *The Final Project*, shown here for the first time in Canada. With these, and each of the artworks presented in *Auto/Pathographies*, sickness is transformed into a site of active aesthetic, political, and even metaphysical inquiry, one whose interest extends well beyond that of the individual subject's narrative.

While the majority of artworks included in the exhibition were produced from an autobiographical perspective (autopathography), some are the result of intimate collaborations between healthy and ill participants (relational

pathography). Such is the case in **Christina Lammer**'s latest video installation, *MAKING FACES*, which records a child's efforts and pleasures in performing rehabilitation exercises following facial reconstruction surgery. In contrast, Lammer's *EMPATHOGRAPHY I* conveys clinicians' perspectives on what it means to be a patient, thereby situating the exhibition's figurations of illness within a larger biopolitical context. For it goes without saying that the sociocultural dimensions of medicine—amongst them, the “sick roles” attributed to patients, as well as the “illness metaphors” identified by Susan Sontag—have significant bearing on the ways in which individuals experience disease.

In most of the artworks presented, the accent is placed on the subject in transformation. Intimate knowledge of the subject-in-flux reveals the limitations of any attempt to adequately communicate experiences of pathos. The collaborative works of **Angela Ellsworth** and **Tina Takemoto** attest to such failures of representation, and moreover, to the limits of the possible empathy between healthy and sick individuals, or between any two beings, for that matter—a limitation which, in the context of this exhibition, might also be felt by viewers in their receptions of auto/pathographies.

Admission of the partial, indirect, or incomplete figuration of pathos is common to many of the works included in the exhibition, and at times becomes their very point of inquiry. **Carl Bouchard**'s video *Mille Excuses (So Sorry)* communicates regret through verbal allusions to a traumatic incident experienced during surgical interventions to the anus. Since the artist neither recorded nor responded to these incidents when they occurred, his past trauma is addressed indirectly through the inverse mirror of more recent dental surgeries, documented with a handheld video camera, against which a fractured narrative of the past incident is recited.

The limits of representation—and indeed, of self-representation—are perhaps most clearly exposed in artists' evocations of their own mortality. For *The Final Project*, **Jo Spence** sought inspiration from Mexican and Egyptian cultures in order to conduct her photographic figurations of death, which present contemporary variations on *vanitas* and *memento mori* motifs, works that remind us of our mortal condition. With **Terry Dennett**, Spence also revisits some of

her older self-portraits, adding layers of decay (using analogue techniques) in order to embed the passage of time into her past self-images. In conducting this impossible visual autothanatography, a representation of her own death, Spence was likely attempting to practice an *ars moriendi*, or art of dying. Rather than strictly convey a morbid end, however, Spence's figurations of death also suggest the possibility of continued transformation, in spite of the subject's demise.

The prospect of hope, transmitted through various processes of regeneration manifested in these images, is a further element at play in the exhibition's focus on the subject in transformation while experiencing illness. In **Chantal duPont**'s video-diary *Du Front tout le tour de la tête (Headstrong)*, the artist's loss of hair during cancer treatment presents her with the opportunity to engage in masquerade and revisit childhood memories until her hair grows back. Some of these images reappear in her more recent video installation, *La Traversée*, shown in OBORO's small gallery.

Pam Patterson's *Lost Objects* can likewise be interpreted as acts of transformation, addressing in this case the artist's declining dexterity. Patterson's loss is made visible through her fabrication of photograms, negative images that are produced through the direct contact of objects on photosensitive paper, conveying the fact that the artist is literally losing her grasp of everyday objects.

Instead of failing to represent, the above artworks rather suggest that the auto/pathographic image attests to processes that by definition exceed it. In this vein, **Susan B. Markisz**' self-portrait *The Road Back* brings the irresolution of illness to the fore. Unlike the military imagery that guides many popular illness metaphors, misleadingly framing its possible outcomes as either “victory” or “defeat,” Markisz presents neither a celebratory embrace nor a recalcitrant retreat. In their place, she communicates a processual in-between, one that cannot be resolved to either extreme.

A convincing counter-proposal to the presumed limitations of interpersonal empathy is presented in **Pascal Dufaux**'s hyper-panoptic portrait of his uncle, Georges Dufaux, taken when he had developed Alzheimer's disease. In Dufaux's