

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

HEATHER CASSILS

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Body of Work

September 7 – October 12, 2013

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of artist Heather Cassils. Utilizing a combination of rigorous physical training, knowledge of kinesiology, and sports science, Cassils uses her body as a sculptural mass, manipulating it into forms that question our society's gendered norms and expectations. Opposing the notion that in order to be officially transgendered one has to have surgery or take hormones, Cassils performs Trans not as a crossing from one sex to another, but rather as a continual process that exists in a space of indeterminacy. Forging her body in various ways for different performative purposes, Cassils constructs a visual critique and discourse around gender ideologies and histories.

Becoming an Image, in the first gallery, is a work that operates at the intersection of performance and sculpture. Originally conceived as a site-specific work for the ONE Archives in Los Angeles (the oldest active LGBTQ archive in the US), this performance will be staged in the gallery on September 7th at 6pm. Cassils will unleash an attack on a 2,000 pound clay block, delivering a series of kicks and blows in total darkness. This spectacle will only be illuminated by the flash of a photographer. The presence and interaction of both audience and photographer in the performance raise questions of witness, documentation, memory, evidence, and accountability. Accompanied by a 4-channel sound installation recreating the sounds of the artist's grunts, breath, and movements, the remains of this violent sculpting will be left for the duration of the exhibition. A concrete cast of the beaten clay from a previous performance will be displayed as an enduring monument to senseless acts of violence against Trans and queer bodies.

In the second gallery, there are three additional works. In a reinterpretation of Eleanor Antin's seminal 1972 performance *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, we have the newest iteration of Cassils' work *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*. As opposed to Antin, who dieted for 45 days and documented her body daily, Cassils used her mastery of body building and nutrition to gain 23 pounds of muscle over the course of 23 weeks. Instead of the traditionally feminine act of weight loss, Cassils transforms into a hyper muscular masculine form. The term cut is taken out of the realm of the surgeon's knife by showcasing the "cut" muscular form. Time-lapse photographs are accompanied by a series of pin-up images made in collaboration with photographer Robin Black as homage to the Linda Benglis work *Advertisement*, 1974. Cassils' masculine physique replaces Benglis' double ended phallus, signaling the shift in our cultural landscape and the role that artists like Benglis had in bringing about these changes.

In the one-channel video installation *Tiresias*, the artist's body is pressed up against an ice sculpture of a neoclassical Greek male torso. The performance takes its name from the mythological figure of the blind prophet of Thebes, who was transformed from a man to a woman for seven years. Over the course of the performance, Cassils melts the sculpture with nothing but pure body heat, demonstrating the instability of the body, and our desire for a certain unsustainable physique.

In the video *Hard Times*, another work based around the myth of Tiresias, the artist performs wearing a prosthetic mask, a frosted blonde wig, and the deep bikini tan of a female body builder, posing in slow motion atop a wooden plank precariously hovering over an audience. Body building is a sport with no other purpose than to present a "perfected" surface. Cassils sees the construction of this unsustainable body as a metaphor for America's insatiable appetite and the drive of capital regardless of consequence. *Hard Times* is a portrait of a social body rotting from the inside out. Drawing on feminism, body art, gay male aesthetics, and Hollywood cinema, Cassils creates a visual language that is at once emotionally striking and conceptually incisive.

Cassils is one of the founding members of the performance group the *Toxic Titties*, (2000-2010). She has been recognized by the Huffington Post as one of 50 Transgendered Icons, and was chosen as one of 30 GLBT Artists and Performers to Follow in celebration of LGBT History Month (2012). Cassils was awarded a Long Term Visual Artist Grant from the Canada Council of the Arts (2012-2014); a Visual Arts Fellowship from the California Community Foundation (2012); an Artist Research Grant from Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) (2010); and the Franklin Furnace Performance Art Grant (2009). Cassils' work has been featured in The National Theater Studio - SPILL International Festival of Performance in London; J. Paul Getty Museum's *Pacific Standard Time* at LACE (2012); Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (2012); the ANTI-Contemporary Art Festival in Finland (2012); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco (2008); and the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Austria (2005).

Reception: Saturday, September 7, 6:00 – 8:00. Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 10:00 – 6:00. Monday by appointment. For more information, contact Erika Kram (212) 226-3232 or erika@feldmangallery.com

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