

THE WASSAIC PROJECT

info@wassaicproject.com / wassaicproject.org / 37 furnace bank rd, box 220, wassaic ny 12592

Curatorial Statement

Kathleen Smith, Curator
Ava Rawski, Assistant Curator

Dis-Robed
documenting and archiving the self today

Dis-Robed: documenting and archiving the self today is an exhibition of contemporary work that probes the intersection of personal and collective memory by investigating the impulse to document and archive the self. At this intersection is portraiture, from self-portraiture to voyeurism and all in between.

Serving as an interactive archive, as a repository for information and a collection of data that is simultaneously stored and active, *Dis-Robed* shows us how identities are performed today, and allow audiences to display their identities in response. Each work has some archival quality in its obsessive and compulsive impulses to document the self, but each work also relies on the works around it and its audience to complete its data. Archiving the self creates memories that shape identities—the artist's, the "sitter's" as well as the viewer's identities—and creates an archive that makes the past present.

This exhibition of video, photography, sculpture, installation and performance is, thus, a portraiture show that unfolds in space and time and relies on its audiences to complete it. All the works, in the words of philosopher and critical theorist Roland Barthes, "point to meaning with a finger"—the works point to their viewers to complete them—and in turn require the subjectivities of their viewers to make meaning. As subject becomes object, as "I" becomes "you" or "she" becomes "her", the identities of the artists, their subjects and their audiences interact and shape each other simultaneously. Costume and clothing play a large part in this exchange. Where these identities slip, and as these identities slip, meaning is made. Subject becomes object as disrobing clothes us in identities that we exhibit to each other and to ourselves.

Dis-Robed serves in some ways to obscure and in other ways make transparent the documentation of self into a contemporary archive of portraiture, a collection of data that comprises identity today. It robes and dis-robots, clothes and strips bare, the self today. Perhaps *Dis-Robed* argues that in being an archive of the self today, it is anti-archival; in a world where data that we use to shape identity overwhelms us, it might be impossible to segregate a space in our personal and collective memories where the past is kept separate from the present. *Dis-Robed: documenting and archiving the self today* expands the notion of archive—it becomes a site where personal and collective memory and identity intersect to create a place for portraiture today that is left incomplete and inconclusive.