

Artist's Archive: to affect/to appear (Planche XXIII.bis) by Erika DeFreitas

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Erika DeFreitas, *very strongly may be sincerely fainting (Augustine)*, 2017.

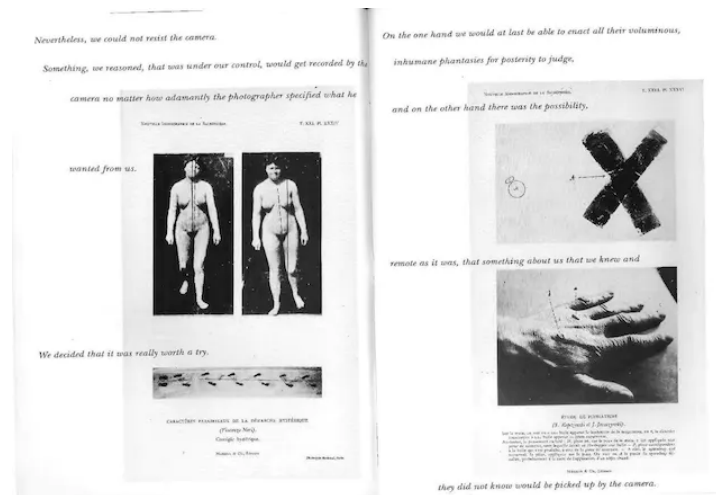
And then there is Augustine.

I live with a black-and-white image of Augustine in mind.

In 1878, Augustine posed for a photograph taken by neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot during her time as his patient at La Salpêtrière hospital in France. Hers was among many photographs taken of women who were institutionalized and subjected to his study and diagnosis of hysteria. Her left leg crosses her right knee as she sits on the sheets of an unkempt bed. Her arms are bent at her side, her hands frame her face, and her head is tilted upward to our right. Her smile is euphoric, her eyes alert, and her hair falls over her shoulders. You can smell the stale linen.

In 2018, I went to La Salpêtrière to visit Augustine. In the series *very strongly may be sincerely fainting* (2017), I collaged the image of Augustine’s arms and the negative space around her while contemplating representation, labour, institutionalization, and the indexing of her body in the history of art. Nicole Jolicoeur and Jeanne Randolph’s 1989 Artist Project for *C Magazine* also responds to Charcot’s *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière (service de M. Charcot)* (1876–1980)—his series of medical photographs of “hysterical” women that include shots of Augustine. Jolicoeur’s collaged images from Charcot’s series accompany text written by psychiatrist and writer Randolph. Reckoning with these photographed women, Randolph tells us, “So much had gone unrecorded.”¹ I think of the lives of those whose only records exist under the veil of someone else’s constructed narrative. Randolph’s words are foreshadowing, inciting us to record differently for Augustine, and the many other women like her.

I don’t remember what her voice sounds like because I was caught in the kindness behind her unmeasured cadence.² As she spoke, she translated and at times apologized for something that lost its warmth when changed into English from French. It didn’t matter to me because I could read her intentions through her gestures—inflections, hand movements, and the body of work that encapsulates her art practice. Do you know what it’s like to speak with someone who can underline your words with resemblance? Someone who is called to by images as you are?



Nicole Jolicoeur and Jeanne Randolph, excerpt from “Y-A-T-IL UNE DEMARCHE HYSTERIQUE?” *C Magazine* no. 24 (Winter 1990)

Let’s continue to record.

Interested in representations of women’s bodies, Jolicoeur didn’t want to repeat the violations enacted by Charcot. I don’t want to speak *for* or *of* but, rather, *with* the women I spend time with. It is easy to repeat the damage done. She and I are aware of the historical wounds that can continue to rupture. The type of repetition we do attempts to interrogate the original image and at times the first author; a refusal of sorts.³ It is possible to pursue the work of re-evaluation and repair with compassion and empathy, while continually reassessing one’s position so as not to risk speaking *for* others: this is the kind of repetition I see in Jolicoeur and Randolph’s project.

I didn’t want to create pathos; I wanted to generate questions.⁴ How can we read these representations of the female body differently? How do we consider the ethics behind re-presenting these women in ways that do not continue to cause harm?

There are ways the image *works* on Jolicoeur. When an image *works* on me, it is visceral. I sit with the feeling and see if it passes, push it aside and lose it among the other images that trouble, or respond to the image in kind. To respond in kind is to be uneasy. Wandering the grounds of La Salpêtrière, aware of Augustine, a dense anger arose in me. This affect was trapped in my chest, along with the echoes of all the women whispering their own names. I chose to sit with them. To respond in kind is to be uneasy. It is to face all that it agitates and disrupts.

It is to be *with*.

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Notes

1 On January 3, 2023, I sent an email introducing myself to Nicole Jolicoeur. On January 10, Nicole and I had our first virtual meeting. During this time we spoke about Nicole's art practice, her relationship to images, and the artist project she created for *C Magazine*.

2 While going through the archives of *C Magazine*, I came across an article written by artist Gordon Lebrecht in 1990. The artist deconstructs theories of repetition to complicate ideas of the *original*. Thinking deeply about the role of repetition in my practice, from reproducing an image to following a similar path to the artists who came before me, I joined Lebrecht in asking the many questions he posed, among them: "But how is it that the original can be repeated or reflected? How is it able to empty itself referentially and to organize a space of inscriptions that would allow it to distinguish itself as an original?" Gordon Lebrecht, "At Home with Repetition" *C Magazine* no. 25 (Spring 1990), 34–42.

3 Nicole Jolicoeur in our discussion that took place on January 10, 2023.

About contributors

Erika DeFreitas's multidisciplinary practice includes performance, photography, video, installation, textiles, drawing, and writing. Placing emphasis on gesture, process, the body, documentation, and paranormal phenomena, DeFreitas mines concepts of loss, post-memory, legacy, and objecthood. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. DeFreitas holds a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto.

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