

Erika DeFreitas' artistic practice explores the influence of language, loss and culture on the formation of identity through performance, public interventions, relational exchanges, photographic documentation and textile-based works. DeFreitas is a graduate of the Masters of Visual Studies Program at the University of Toronto and has exhibited projects in artist-run centres in Canada and the United States. Recent and upcoming exhibition sites include Gallery TPW, A Space Gallery, Gallery 44, Propeller Centre for Visual Arts in Toronto, the Houston Museum of African American Culture, performances with the 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art, and a residency at Mentoring Artists for Women's Art (MAWA) in Winnipeg.

Pamela Edmonds is a visual and media arts curator who received her BFA and an MA in Art History from Concordia University, Montreal. She is interested in developing contemporary art projects that deal with cultural identity and the politics of representation. Recent curated exhibitions include 28 Days (Justina M. Barnicke Gallery/Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto, 2012), Streaming Alterity (Art Gallery of Peterborough, 2012) and Serious Play (SPACE, London UK, 2011). She is a founding member of Third Space Art Projects, a curatorial collective co-founded in 2009 with Sally Frater. Third Space Art Projects is a forum for the promotion, presentation and development of multidisciplinary art projects that engage transcultural and diasporic communities, with a particular focus on visual cultures of the Black Atlantic.

1. Okwui Enwezor, "Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument," in *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Steidl/ICP, 2008), 11.

2. Erika DeFreitas, (Unpublished Essay), "Deaths, Memorials, Births: Autobiography, Narrative and Image" (2007), 6.

3. Ibid.

4. Erika DeFreitas, "Friday, November 24, 2006."

5. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 67.

6. Ibid, 68.

7. Ibid.



IMAGES

above:

Erika DeFreitas. *In Lieu of*. (detail) Newspaper and Beeswax. Variable Dimensions. 2013.

front:

Erika DeFreitas. *Deaths, Memorials, Births, Saturday, November 11, 2006* digital photograph on Kozuke paper, 25" x 27", 2006-2013

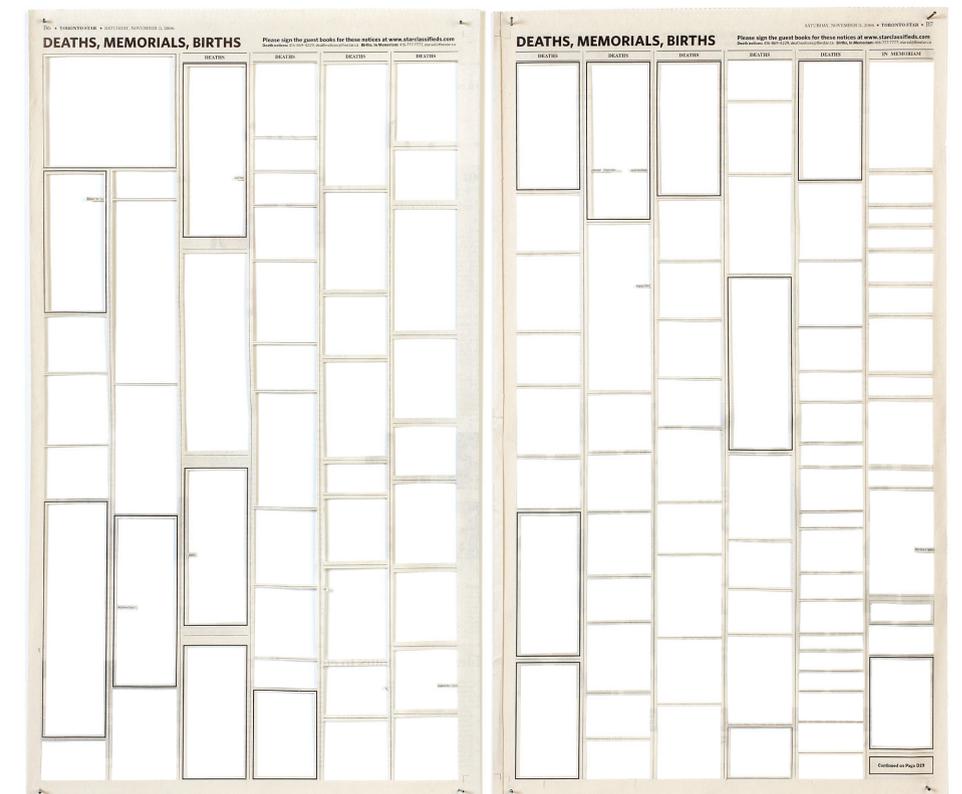
Photo credit: Daniel Ehrenworth.



Gallery Hours: Wednesday to Saturday 12 pm - 5 pm

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ERIKA DEFREITAS *DEATHS/MEMORIALS/BIRTHS* Curated by Pamela Edmonds



March 1- April 13, 2013

DEATHS/MEMORIALS/BIRTHS

...the artist serves as the historic agent of memory, while the archive emerges as a place in which concerns with the past are touched by the astringent vapors of death, destruction and degeneration...it is also within the archive that acts of remembering and regeneration occur, where a suture between the past and present is performed, in the indeterminate zone between event and image, document and monument.

- Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*¹

Erika DeFreitas' interdisciplinary, process-orientated works investigate constructs of memorialisation through conceptualist strategies. Drawing on both personal and cultural histories, her artistic practice explores the uneasy relationship between presence and absence, raising questions about what the body can and cannot remember, offering ways of negotiating individual and cultural loss by making 'absence' present in the representational field.

DEATHS/MEMORIALS/BIRTHS is a re-imagining of a project focused on the artist's archive of obituary, memorial and birth notices collected daily from the pages of the Toronto Star newspaper between November 7, 2006 and September 7, 2007. Leavened by an interest in the affective power of the disruptive gesture and the stark aesthetics of minimalism, DeFreitas systematically cut away the announcements' original images and texts, removing all specific biographical information, leaving in place the page headings and rectangular black borders surrounding the listings. Within these grid-like empty frames, she painstakingly replaced

back particular sections of the notices, situating text fragments into their original spaces, highlighting resonant words into a compelling sequence of metaphoric narratives. Of this process, she writes: "Reading over the death notices, I started to formulate memories of experiences – many of these memories are fabricated, as they became constructions of what I imagined past relationships were like, as they became constructions of what I imagined past relationships were like, are like in the present, and would be like in the future."² The product of this act is presented here as a series of digitized ink jet prints, systematically arranged on the gallery walls in chronological order. Accompanying the display is a methodical compilation of all of the original newspaper remnants, individually coated and preserved in beeswax, meticulously stacked, and arranged alphabetically by name.

In its initial incarnation, presented as part of her graduate studies at the University of Toronto, DeFreitas exhibited the actual cut pieces of newsprint, the delicate and aged pages eloquently speaking to the tenuous nature of human mortality. The newspaper, especially as an 'everyday' object, acts as the materialization of time's passages while also standing in as an indexical evocation of the absent body. Shown again in 2008, at the Platform Centre for Photography and Digital Arts in Winnipeg, she chose to re-present the images as a sequence of wall photographs, creating a counter-archive of the series itself. A clever meditation on the photographic document as monument, DeFreitas calls attention to both the ephemeral nature of the original work as well as to the elusive nature of the re-configured memorials. The inclusion of the actual notices, exhibited here for the first time, remind viewers of the artist's own performative practice, evidence of her unique plays on visuality and language. Not only do these recent sculptural pieces signal a re-materialization of the art object, pushing the content of this conceptual work into three dimensional form, they also allude to the actuality of each individual as bodily presence, conjured by textural qualities of the wax layered papers which viscerally evoke the corporeal qualities of human skin.

The obliteration of the actual details of the notices functions in a sense as anti-portraits, reminding us, as Michel Foucault observed, that the modern social self is produced through successive dislocations and the acceptance of inevitable incompleteness. The works move us to a space beyond history, a space of mystery where what is captured is a experience of both liberation and

containment. The displacement of authorship is cited by the artist as an "informal collaboration" with the writer of the original words, opening up an accessible 'third space' where anyone reading the words can appropriate the narrative to conform to personal experience, memory or thought. Further, 'the words are meant to be read vertically, the standard way in which one would read the obituaries, however based on instinct one may be inclined to read the words in a linear, horizontal manner. To do so would create another re-reading of the reconstructed narrative, further complicating the moments of contemplation that may occur.'³

*a childhood dream from an afternoon nap made her Weep for the courage She leaves behind his lengthy Messages postponed the breeze he has gone away, his vacant chair. a low whisper will not return a part of the past. and This emptiness grows,*⁴

DEATHS/MEMORIALS/BIRTHS aligns itself with what critic Andreas Huyssen terms "memory sculpture" and, in so doing, transfers the work of remembering from artist to viewer.⁵ Huyssen identifies the emergence of artistic projects that "perform a kind of memory work that activates body, space, and temporality, matter and imagination, presence and absence in a complex relationship with their beholder."⁶ These works, which occupy not the public spaces of monuments and memorials but the more intimate spaces of the museum or gallery, address individuals at a corporeal level, even though the human body is often "just as absent and elusive as it would be in any memory of the past."⁷

DeFreitas' art is filled with such apparent contradictions: concerned with impermanence and mortality, yet life-affirming and regenerative, marked with a sense of enduring hope in the face of loss and a deep sense of connectedness with others and the world - ephemeral testaments to lives lived, to labour endured and to inevitable passages.

Pamela Edmonds, 2013