

*Night Watch (Origin of the World)*

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*The Hey Baby Book for Krista*, 2020, 43" x 65" framed, pigmented print on platine rag, edition of 3

How can we hold spectacle and depth together in one body? This exhibition is a collision of work from two series which trace the female subject, traditionally stuck within invisibility, though ironically, often a showpiece, endlessly gazed upon. Her spectacle is one dimensional, a one trick pony, we expect no ensuing depth. The female subject is then riven, a living vacillation, as she fights to move beyond image while retaining a foothold in all for which she is constantly seen.

The body of work, "Midnight Special" centers on a piece of common lingerie as a stand in for this body. The objecthood of the female body is blatantly represented by the garment (its image impossible not to conjure) yet the actual body is absent. The image becomes acknowledgement of an undeniable and yet involuntary bodily presence. Baroque iridescent drawings of sparkling ink on black paper, hesitate between a shameless joy and a begrudging recalcitrance. The video, *Drawn*, with the same garment as subject, moves in and out of readability composing itself for the viewer only occasionally. The light mimics silver ink and graphite in the act of drawing, projected on a leather hide as if drawn and quartered, quoting the body as object, viscerally.

A photograph from the body of work "Photos of Gifts", *The Hey Baby Book for Krista*, joins in this conversation with its flash and subtle sexuality pulling us in, silver chains shining among a black leather clad crotch all tied up with a pretty pink bow. This work quotes Courbet's famous painting *Origin of the*

*World* which renders a similar point of view, a female form with head and limbs cropped out; a portrait of a woman essentialized as origin/orifice. In another photograph from this series installed directly across, *Ref Stevie T-Shirt for JLM*, a woman's face spreads over the entire picture plane, representing an almost opposite bodily frame. Both images contain a flattened fashion advertisement complicated by its presence within real space, while the titles hint to us that there is something more, a book, a t-shirt, a gift that is given. The blatantly fractured body is replicated by the ruptured space of the photograph and complicated with generosity.

The title of the large drawing *Night Watch* pays homage to the 1936 novel *Nightwood* by Djuna Barnes. Night, as you may imagine, invades many passages. The central character repeatedly, compulsively, steals away in the middle of the night to satiate her wilder impulses giving her a kind of power or freedom but exposing her as extremely vulnerable. The open, limitless night coexists with the impossibility to revel alone for fear of bodily harm.

In this work the ever-present female body and the simultaneously unseen female subject are transformed towards a celebration of their irreconcilability, the sparkling beauty of the subject in its place among the shadows. Within this contradiction there is an underlying ecstatic freedom that cautiously steps over a precipice. There is a devastation present, as well as an effusive and elaborate beauty, which hints at a truth.

In an ekphrastic piece about this work, Jen Logan Meyer writes:

*While on a walk, just about dark, I hear soft footfalls, behind. I often walk at dusk — l'heure bleu (oh the French and their euphonious names). In the darkish, the flashy spirals and comet tails of headlights, lamp posts, bicycle reflectors linger in my sight like the phosphenes that appear when I press into closed eyes, that so quickly vanish when opened. I imagine I'm wearing a cape — light as a whisper — and when one of those feet behind me steps on it, I am released. Molting. Out of the blue, and into the black.*

-Heather Bennett