

Wishes / Souhairs

Dayna Danger – Émilie Monnet

September 16 – October 21, 2017

We need to talk about bad Indigenous art—trauma porn, to be exact. How many times have Indigenous women’s, and gender variant and sexually diverse Indigenous peoples’ bodies been deconstructed, dissected and made consumable for the settler gaze? Too many. In the case of trauma porn, aesthetics of brutalization, violence and gore are visually enacted on Indigenous bodies to create visceral responses from the viewers—a scalp nailed to a door, or a wrapped and bloody corpse laid out in the street to provoke reactions from public onlookers.

Émilie Monnet, Dayna Danger and the participants who worked on *Wishes / Souhairs* are sick to death of your dehumanizing portrayals of their bodies and lives—quite literally, considering that objectifying representations of Indigenous peoples often depict them as reaching their inevitable end at terminal velocity. This is where *Wishes / Souhairs* begins. Émilie Monnet, Dayna Danger and five individuals who have previously used the Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal—Brenda Lee Marcoux, Gail Golder, Jenna Guanish, Violet Rose Quinney and Crystal Star Einish—sought to self-determine representations of themselves in empowered states through art. The individuals Monnet and Danger worked with wanted to present their bodies not as deconstructed and trauma-ridden parts enacting stereotypes of unending grief, but as sanctuaries and sources of empowerment instead.

Photographs of Marcoux, Golder, Guanish, Quinney and Einish were composed during the creative processes for *Wishes / Souhairs*, then superimposed onto copper shields—copper being a sacred materiality amongst West Coast Indigenous and Anishinabek nations—and the participant’s bodies were transformed into a kind of armor themselves. With *Wishes / Souhairs*, Danger shed her typically grandiose way of presenting photographs in the gallery, herself, Monnet and the participants instead opting to superimpose portrait size images onto the shields. Almost like family photos, this scaled down presentation considers the intimate space Danger, Monnet and the other participants have created for the viewer, as well as the kinships they created amongst themselves throughout their creative processes.

Says Monnet, “The shininess of copper is meant to emulate the stars.” These representations, then, are intendedly projected into the cosmos. The stars, ancient kin themselves, become a proxy wherein the participants can cast their dreams and desires, and draw concepts of relationality from. *Wishes / Souhairs* is intentionally grounded in principles of the star blanket, and each participant’s representation comprises a portion of the star structure of the installation. After all, it’s blankets, or our (star) ancestors and relations, that protect us from harmful elements, just as our bodies do in the absence of kin and refuge materialities like blankets—like an armor made of skin.

Sanctuary of self is reinforced by the immersive state the viewer is transported to when they are embraced by the participants, or the blanket, within the space of the gallery. Recordings of conversations between Monnet, Danger and the other participants are made available to the viewer (or the listener) through headphones—kitchen table conversations over tea or food wherein Monnet, Danger and the other participants converse, share and heal amongst one another. The headphones also play recordings of monologues the participants wrote during writing processes leading up to *Wishes / Souhairs*, wherein they articulate alter egos, or a persona they wanted to manifest—a “star self,” says Monnet. The headphones allow the viewer/listener to share in intimate moments of storytelling and community care with Monnet, Danger and the participants, and to witness their emergent collective voice. Holding all this, the gallery itself becomes a type of sanctuary—a feeling that is sustained by an ambient sound that plays throughout the space instilling a sense of stillness, calm and tranquility.

With *Wishes / Souhairs*, Danger, Monnet, Marcoux, Golder, Guanish, Quinney and Einish ask us, *what does it mean to be able to dream, and to create a space wherein we can imagine something else—something more? Who is allowed to envision their future, and to project their bodies into a future imaginary using the empowered and sacred?* In the space created to hold these queries, you will find Indigenous drag that pays respect to a medicine man ancestor, a simple desire to rekindle creative power through music, BDSM subculture playfully enacted to visually depict spiritual power and even wishes especially devised for our future generations—for our grand-babies. With the aid of Monnet and Danger’s care, the individuals who participated in *Wishes / Souhairs* claimed and named their bodies as spaces of sanctuary and refuge in the face of colonial dispossession. As Dayna Danger has said, when you don’t have a place to call your own, your body becomes that place where you can feel most safe.

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