

DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
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Collection Count + Care

Count + Care seeks relationships within and conversations across the collection.

What stories does the collection tell?

2022

FEATURED WORKS

Tran T. Kim-Trang, *Operculum*, 1993, video 14:00 minutes. Purchase, 1996

Barbara Astman, *I as artifact*, 2014, 20 digital prints on Epson Ultrasmooth Fine Art Paper.

Gift of the Artist, 2020

KEYWORDS

Contemporary Art, Barbara Astman, Tran T Kim-Trang, Art Collection

TRANSCRIPT

[Singing]

Of all the patients that I've operated on, this is hopefully to make you feel a little better I'm telling you this. I've done about 6000 surgeries and about 30% of my patients are of Asian background. About a third of them are Korean. About a third are Filipino and about a third are Southeast Asian. Most are Vietnamese, probably because there's such a large Vietnamese population in Los Angeles. I have about, it's going to sound strange, but probably 40 or 50 patients with the last name "Nguyen".

Oh, uh huh, yes.

And many, many Trans too. So, the fact that, I would be looking for-- and I don't know if you find this acceptable, you have to tell me, would be to lift the lid so that it were a little bit more like that.

Yeah.

Because right now, you have sort of a flat appearance centrally here and it angles down like this. And what I would like to do, if I were to do something, would be to give you a little bit more of a curvature and, just as you say, a little bit deeper fold.

Right.

Right in this area here. Now, if we just came down right here, without removing this sort of triangle in the outer corner by extending a little bit, it would-- it would round the eye a bit. So, you'd look too much like me, I think. [chuckling] But it-- by coming out here a little bit in the corner and coming upward a little bit--

[Singing]

TEXT OVERLAY

Collections Count + Care is a revolving exhibition. It is a series of conversations between small groupings of works from Agnes's collection. Changing over every two weeks, the Samuel J. Zacks Gallery currently features a photographic series by Barbara Astman called *I as artifact* and a video work by Tran T. Kim-Trang called *Operculum*.

Operculum discloses voices and footage from several consultation meetings for cosmetic surgery of the upper and lower eyelids on an Asian woman. Tran T. Kim-Trang presents the surgeons's explanations of the popularity and success rates for different Asian nationalities. She frames them with a written description of experimental lobotomy through the eye socket designed to eradicate schizophrenic hallucination. *Operculum* means "little lid" from Latin and signifies, in animal and brain biology, covers or flaps that open or close to control contact with internal and external world. Kim-Trang turns a camera's own aperture on the "self-effacing fantasy" of these surgeries and the normalized black hole that is insistently neutralizing differences on the face. The piece ends with a laugh, however; a found movie clip shows Lao Ze disguising his eyelids and erupting in laughter as he looks into what seems to be a mirror.

The faces in Barbara Astman's *I as artifact* seem to sing silently or to express thrown voices. Their eyes seem wide open to a void within and all around. Or perhaps, instead, do we look *out*—through a mask that would cover our own faces, as if the mask were glimpsed from an uncanny remote interior? Astman reveals a multiplicity of possible expressions temporarily frozen at the intersection of desires and practices. To produce this series, Astman exposed her own cosmetic facial masks on a scanner bed and then inverted their values, digitally emphasizing their folds and creases. They become like a chorus of planetary topographies that offers solace but no anaesthetic.

The pairing suggests critical encounters with the face as a social landscape, one where gender, race, ethnicity and age intersect, and where normative violence enacts physical intercessions. At the same time the works express counteracting proliferations of difference. We cannot see our own faces directly, and ultimately, the facial diagram is frayed by a mutability that implies passage to chaotic universes.

Curated by Sunny Kerr