

Be Wiser. Me
Always

Take

Any Form

Drive

Me

Madi

Be With Me Always, Take Any Form, Drive Me Mad
December 6-14, 2018
Curated by First-Year Graduate Students Ana Lopes,
Ciena Leshley, and Liz Lorenz

III CCS BARD

Haunting

adj • noun • verb

to be persistently and disturbingly present in

the act of someone/something manifesting itself regularly

to be poignant and unforgettable

to be directly attached to that which one no longer knows

Julian Wolfreys argues in *Victorian Hauntings* (2002) that “to tell a story is to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns,” so that “all stories are, more or less, ghost stories.” *Be With Me Always, Take Any Form, Drive Me Mad* brings together eight artists whose works simultaneously appear haunting and haunted. The disruptiveness of haunting mirrors the liminal space where one encounters the knowable and the unknowable, that which is familiar but has been distorted or changed. The works here carry ghosts as a tangible weight; the weight of memory, opacity, power, stillness, lingering, and absence.

A concern with haunting has always been present in human experience—present as a disconcerting occurrence, while always seeming to draw one closer in attempts to understand and to rationalize. This tension, intrinsic and personal, has resulted in the embodied experience of haunting being translated into a rhetorical concept. Most notably, Jacques Derrida developed the portmanteau combining haunting and ontology to describe a moment of temporal, historical, and ontological disjunction that results in “a spectrally deferred non-origin for terms such as history and identity.”¹ As the conceptual and critical framework of haunting is consistently developed, the embodied experience is still present. *Be With Me Always, Take Any Form, Drive Me Mad* holds both at its core: The bodily and critical disjunction prompted by haunting.

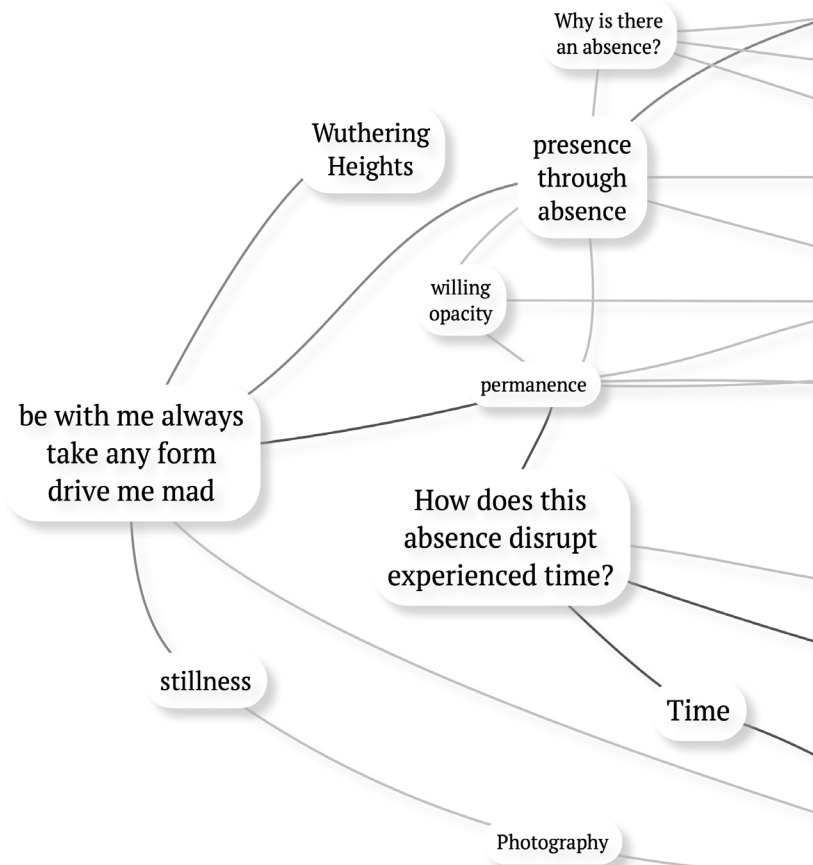
The works gathered in this exhibition speak to encountering that which inhabits us, yet we are unable to grasp. In the works of Eileen Quinlan, Saul Fletcher, and Paolo Mussat, there is a distilled suggestion of a presence, someone who cannot be seen but is felt. One can identify different kinds of layering taking place in the images. A layering that distorts a familiar image: a layering of photographic developing processes, visual fields, and subject/object relations. The photographs by Ana Mendieta and Felix Gonzalez-Torres force us to contemplate the questions of why these bodies are absent. Embedded in their distinct socio-political contexts, these works broach the politics of bodily absence.

1 Buse, P. and Scott, A. (ed's). *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*. London: Macmillan, 1999.

The works by Troy Brauntuch and Marlo Pascual play with the idea of illumination. They each use light to reveal or obscure their subject. Both artists also utilize found photographs, reminding us of pre-existing histories which we can never uncover. Laurel Nakadate's "Exorcism in January" contains complex layers of candidness, acting, relations of fleshy bodies, and haunting. This video is a shift from the above works, not only in medium, but also in tone. Taking on an uncomfortable humor, the work is simultaneously uneasy and surreal. Located at the end of the exhibition's path, it asks the viewer to re-conceptualize the show that has been initially presented.

Just as the exhibition brings together artworks through a set of relationships defined as haunting—including disturbing manifestations, lingering attachments and poignant presences—this layered activity or feeling of haunting also occurs outside of each individual work. The very Collection that houses these works haunts the works and is haunted by the collector's presence and the opacity of the intention of her choices. Marieluise Hessel has referenced her desire to collect as filling a loss, alluding to the Collection itself as a sort of self-portrait. While the Hessel Collection cannot represent its collector in her totality, by existence, it is a reproduction of Hessel's desires, tastes, and affects.

The exhibition looks at the shortcomings of visual representation through works that evade tangible meaning and stable interpretations, always lingering barely out of reach. Ghosts from our past haunt our present in unexpected ways, through shadows and flickering lights, through mirrors and portraits, through images of ourselves and our loved ones. The exhibition's title--*Be With Me Always, Take Any Form, Drive Me Mad*--is a line from Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*. In the book, upon the death of his beloved Catherine, the grieving Heathcliff challenges, rather implores, her to haunt him so that she will remain in his life no matter how disturbing her presence. This sentiment echoes the complex relationships we all have toward haunting: the strange allure of seeking the impossible; navigating the ghosts that will always live in us yet never be resolved.



A Note on the Artists:

Be With Me Always, Take Any Form, Drive Me Mad features eight artworks that can be seen as simultaneously haunting and haunted. Tangible yet elusive presences—exemplified by photography, ghosts sightings, or horror films—are predicated on illumination, as both literal light and conceptual function. Thus, illumination becomes an important aspect in either covering or uncovering meaning. Troy Brauntuch, born in 1954 in Jersey City, NJ, plays with the visual qualities and evocative potentials of light and dark. Specifically in the painting *Untitled (Statue)*, a shadowy figure—effectively an outline—stands at a dramatic scale, barely visible against the almost pitch-black background. Viewers themselves become reflected in the glass pane that frames the canvas, casting uncertainty upon who/what is obscured in the abyss versus who/what is present in the optic field. Brauntuch’s practice “highlights the strange effects such alienation and then reuniting of form and content can have on a viewer.”¹ While his works “appear void-like in their blackness,” they are actually composed of layers of color and based on found images.²

Marlo Pascual also employs found photographs, which she reworks and enlarges. Born in 1972 in Nashville, TN, Pascual sources images or fragments of images from various domestic and archival contexts. She notes that, by reconstructing the photographs, “you’re more aware of what the original photographer was projecting onto the object, and more aware of what you yourself are projecting onto the object.”³ Inhabiting a register between theater prop and mausoleum, her “newly objectified” images are literally balanced on bars of light (fluorescent tubes)—consciously lit and posed, yet clinging to their memories.⁴

Eileen Quinlan, born in 1972 in Boston, MA, creates works that border on abstraction through a repetitive process of photographing, manipulating, and re-photographing an initial image. Her methods are in dialogue with the tricks of early spirit photography, which fabricated hoaximages of ghostly ectoplasm (or visible spiritual energy) by combining multiple exposures. Quinlan uses reproductive techniques to insist on of all “the constructed nature photographs.”⁵

Her layerings and distortions ensure that “the hand of the artist is both absent and frustratingly present,” and they evoke the potential transformations of memory and material.⁶

Within the photographs of Paolo Mussat and Saul Fletcher, a dialogue between presence and absence also exists, underlined by the obfuscation or lack of the fleshy body, respectively. Their works animate this exchange by displacing the visible body, creating an environment where the body is remembered yet absent, or possibly only merely suggested. Born in 1947 in Turin, Italy, Mussat produced a series of black and white photographs in the late 1960s and early 1970s that features artists who were his peers—including portraits of Luciano Fabro (on view here), Giuseppe Penone, and Michelangelo Pistoletto. The portraits hint at the identity of each artist while invoking a veritable estrangement between their depictions and their bodies, as well as destabilizing the traditional role of portraiture. Likewise, Fletcher crafts a pseudo-portrait where the body is not immediately present in the image. The English artist, born in 1967, often deals with intimate spaces and spectral silences while emphasizing distortion. In *Untitled #234 Blue Room 2*, the surroundings and possessions of the subject are visible as reflections in the mirror. However, the voyeuristic suggestion of a person (who is felt but not physically present) lingers just beyond the frame.

In the works of Ana Mendieta and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, viewers are similarly forced to reconcile with a body that is not visually represented, but that they know or assume was once there. These photographs actively utilize the uncertainty and unknowability of the body’s past presence to draw out the politics of absence and to create room to understand specific conditions that make these bodies absent. Born in 1948, Mendieta was a Cuban exile (d. 1985, NYC) whose work spans performance, film, and photography and often examines connections between the body, nature, and femininity. The prints that compose *Untitled (from the Silueta Series)* capture Mendieta’s actions of carving the outline of her figure on the earth and in the sea using various material means. While the outlines were erased by the natural cycles of tides and erosion, Mendieta’s photographs allowed her to embody the ancient goddess through these “haunting documents of her ephemeral attempts to seek out,

in her words, that “one universal energy which runs through everything.”⁷ A Cuban artist working primarily in the United States, Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) often incorporated political concerns and activist tendencies surrounding his homosexual identity into his art practice. After his longtime partner Ross Laycock died of AIDS, Gonzalez-Torres created a series of photographs that poetically and literally evoke Ross’ absence. In “Untitled” (*A Walk In the Snow*), the silent scream of empty footsteps haunts viewers—an undeniably visceral image.

Born in 1975 in Austin, TX, Laurel Nakadate produces videos and photographs in which she interacts with older men, generally strangers, in unsettlingly intimate ways. Creating a direct atmosphere of haunting through its dialogue, the video *Exorcism in January* contains multitudes of distortions that force viewers to question what is real versus what is imagined, what is staged versus what is candid. A critic wrote that “voyeurism, exhibitionism and hostility merge with gullibility, cunning and folly in Nakadate’s work. Not only is this creepy, it’s confusing and complicated.”⁸ This sense of surrealism, malaise, and intrigue that permeates Nakadate’s video can be used to consider/reconsider the exhibition’s definition of haunting and the spooky array of its essence and affects.

Endnotes:

- 1 Chrissie Iles and Philippe Vergne, eds., *Whitney Biennial 2006: Day For Night* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2006), 186.
- 2 Troy Brauntuch, "Troy Brauntuch's Dark Matter," interview by Hannah Mandel, *Interview Magazine*, last modified May 10, 2013, accessed November 20, 2018, [https:// www.interviewmagazine.com/art/troy-brauntuchs-dark-matter](https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/troy-brauntuchs-dark-matter).
- 3 Lisa Hostetler, ed., *A Matter of Memory: Photography as Object in the Digital Age* (Rochester, NY: George Eastman Museum, 2016), 106.
- 4 William A. Ewing, "Marlo Pascual," Saatchi Gallery, accessed November 20, 2018, [https:// www.saatchigallery.com/artists/marlo_pascual.htm](https://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/marlo_pascual.htm).
- 5 "Eileen Quinlan," Miguel A breu Gallery, last modified January 16, 2018, accessed November 20, 2018, http://miguelabreugallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/EQuinlan_Bio_CV-1.pdf.
- 6 "Eileen Quinlan," Miguel Abreu Gallery.
- 7 at Trotman, "Ana Mendieta," Guggenheim, accessed November 20, 2018, [https:// www.guggenheim.org/artwork/5221](https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/5221).
- 8 Jerry Saltz, "Whatever Laurel Wants," *ArtNet*, last modified April 2005, accessed November 8 20, 2018, <http://www>.

Included Works:

Ana Mendieta

Untitled (from the Silueta Series), 1976

Nine C-prints, Edition 10/10

20 5/8 in. x 26 3/8 in.

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Marlo Pascual

Untitled, 2011

Digital C-print, fluorescent light fixtures, and rocks

30 in. x 21 in. x 46 in.

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Troy Brauntuch

Untitled (Statue), 2016

Pigment on cotton

100 3/4 in. x 55 in.

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Paolo Mussat

Lo spirato [Fabro], 1968

Black and white photograph

25 7/8 in. x 19 15/16 in.

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Saul Fletcher

Untitled #234 Blue Room 2, 2011

C-print, Edition 2/5

10 3/8 in. x 8 5/8 in.

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

"Untitled" (A Walk In the Snow), 1993

C-print, Unique

24 7/8 in. x 32 in.

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Eileen Quinlan

The Raft, 2010

Gelatin silver print on mounted on aluminum, Edition of 3 + 2 AP

62 1/8 in. x 50 1/8 in.

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Laurel Nakadate

Exorcism in January, 2009

Single-channel HD digital video, Edition 3/6

Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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