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COMPOSING DWARFISM: REFRAMING SHORT STATURE IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

JUNE 27 – JULY 19, 2014

OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY JUNE 27, 7-10PM

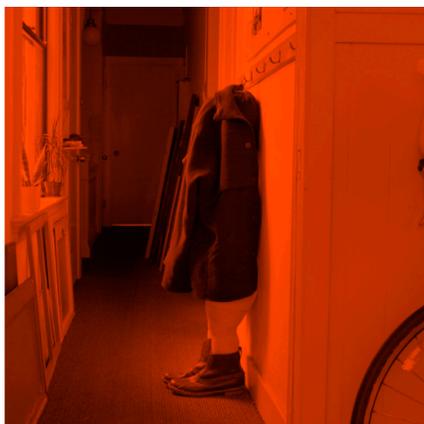
LITTLE PEOPLE OF AMERICA RECEPTION: SATURDAY JULY 5, 6-9PM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICARDO GIL AND LAURA SWANSON

CURATED BY AMANDA CACHIA

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CURATED BY AMANDA CACHIA
SPACE4ART, SAN DIEGO, JUNE 27 – JULY 19, 2014



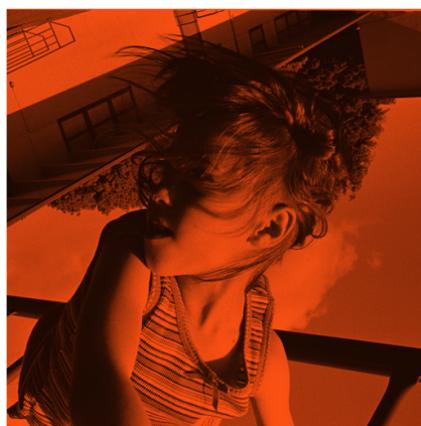
LAURA SWANSON
Coat, 2005, inkjet print, 20 x 30"



LAURA SWANSON
Pillow, 2008, inkjet print, 20 x 30"



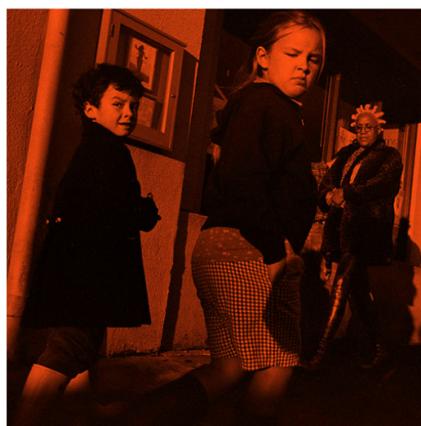
LAURA SWANSON
Peggy Lee, 2008, inkjet print, 20 x 30"



RICARDO GIL
Girl on Bars, c. 1998, giclée print, 11 x 14"



RICARDO GIL
Tibar's Dog, 2001, giclée print, 11 x 14"



RICARDO GIL
Bad Girl, c. 2002, giclée print, 11 x 14"

This exhibition explores the work of two contemporary dwarf photographers, Ricardo Gil and Laura Swanson, who use different conceptual and technical methods in order to re-frame the composition of the dwarf subject. The dwarf has often been a marginalized subject in the history of contemporary art and photography, labeled as deviant, pathological, freak and “other,” so this exhibition presents the strategies that Gil and Swanson employ in order to resist reductive meanings, and offer alternative interpretations of the dwarf.

In the last two decades, Ricardo Gil developed a series of photographs where the distinct feature is how they portray the dwarfed viewpoint, for we see the world through the lens of Gil who stands at 3'9" feet tall. The outcome of this means that the subjects of his frames were shaped by his perspective – we will often only see the legs of average-height people (the remainder of their bodies chopped off at the top of the frame), or conversely, we discern Gil's physical distance upon looking down at a dog or looking up at a girl on the monkey bars. Gil also includes a series of self portraits that range from close facial compositions to full body views of his dwarf frame, where he is juxtaposed against various objects to demonstrate a noticeable size difference, such as Gil's corpus in contrast to a large boat, or how he lines up (or rather doesn't line up or fit) with the height of the urinal installed at “average” height on the wall of a male public restroom.

In Laura Swanson's series entitled *Anti-Self-Portraits* (2005-2008), in addition to other photos in her oeuvre, the artist has obscured or covered over her face, drawing attention to the fact that she is denying something from her viewers. Through this act of concealing, Swanson is actually revealing her vulnerabilities, fears and frustrations over being judged and stared at, simply because of her atypical embodiment. In *Revelation* (2009), the artist stands beside her partner, Greg, in a diptych that splits their bodies in half at the torso. Where the left side of the portrait remains ambiguous in any height difference, as their bodies side by side look ostensibly symmetrical, the right side reveals how this symmetry was actually achieved. Swanson thus endeavors to play tricks on our eyes and challenge normative assumptions around symmetry. Finally, the artist also includes a series of selfies displayed on an iPad slideshow. The images were taken quickly as a means to record and capture Swanson's engagement with objects, architectures and spaces in her everyday environment.

In their strategies of re-directing the gaze of the viewer, privileging the dwarf subject, and more generally re-framing depictions of the short statured embodiment, I suggest that these artists significantly depart from the stigmatized status surrounding the dwarf's representations in the work of many non-dwarf photographers. Instead, the viewer will be made more aware of the psychology of the dwarf, as a means to encourage the compassionate involvement of the viewer, as opposed to attracting a historically prevalent morbid and reductive curiosity. If we examine the power and agency held by Gil and Swanson in the photography showcased in this exhibition, viewers may come upon different perceptions of dwarfism that have received scant attention in art history and criticism. Most importantly, we learn to see the dwarf from both behind and in front of the camera, with full knowledge that they are the ones in control of both sides of its lens.

This exhibition is sponsored by the Dwarf Artists Coalition for the Little People of America, and is held in conjunction with the annual Little People of America convention (<http://www.lpaonline.org/national-conference-2014>) hosted by the Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel in downtown San Diego from July 4 – July 10, 2014.

This text is an excerpt from an essay that will appear in a special issue of the *Review of Disability Studies* journal on Art History and Disability Studies, forthcoming.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

RICARDO GIL

Born in New Orleans and raised in Puerto Rico, Gil studied Fine Arts at the California College of Arts and Crafts, the College of Marin, Kentfield and Laney College in Oakland. His work has been exhibited within the United States at the Fresno Art Museum, Euphrat Museum, College of Marin Art Gallery, The Berkeley Art Center, the 1078 Gallery, and the San Francisco's Eye Gallery. Gil was awarded a 1998/1999 California Visual Arts Fellowship in photography. His work is held in several private collections and the Fresno Museum of Art. Gil and his partner live and work in Denver, Colorado. www.ricardogil.com

LAURA SWANSON

Born in Minneapolis, Swanson received her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2011 and BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2008. Her work has been exhibited within the United States at the RISD Museum of Art, Camera Club of New York, and San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery, and internationally at Arsenal Institute for Film and Video in Berlin, Germany, Media Arts Gallery in Warsaw, Poland, and in South Korea at the Jeju Museum of Contemporary Art. Swanson was a NEA John Renna Art Scholar in 2008-2010, Jacob K. Javits Fellow in 2010-2011, and received a Wynn Newhouse Award from the Samuel I. Newhouse Foundation in 2013. Her work is held in the collection at the Jeju Museum of Contemporary Art in Jeju, South Korea. She lives and works in New York, NY. www.lauraswanson.com

CURATOR BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Cachia is an independent curator from Sydney, Australia and she is the 2014 recipient of the Irving K. Zola Award for Emerging Scholars in Disability Studies, issued by the Society for Disability Studies (SDS). Cachia completed her second Masters degree in Visual & Critical Studies at the California College of the Arts (CCA) in San Francisco in 2012, and received her first Masters in Creative Curating from Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2001. She held the position Director/Curator of the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada from 2007-2010, and has curated approximately 30 exhibitions over the last ten years in various cities across the USA, England, Australia and Canada. Cachia is a dwarf activist and has been the Chair of the Dwarf Artists Coalition for the Little People of America (LPA) since 2007. For more information, visit www.amandacachia.com