



Bodies in Crisis

Curated by Caroline Cason & Lizzie Zucker Saltz
Sunday, January 30th – Sunday, March 6, 2005

Participating Artists:

Ruth Adams (Lexington, KY), James Barany (Milwaukee, WI), Malena Bergmann (Charlotte, NC), Angie Grass (Athens, GA), Kevin Hoth (Athens, GA), David Kasdorf (Bellefonte, PA), Doreen Laperdon-Addison (Neptune, New Jersey), Ron Lambert (Seattle, WA), Cristin Millet (State College, PA), Roger Reeves (Phenix City, AL)

ATHICA: Athens Institute for Contemporary Art proudly presents *Bodies in Crisis*, artwork addressing illness, surgery, and recovery. The ten artists in *Bodies in Crisis* offer their stories in a variety of media, including photography, interactive sculpture and installation, painting and DV video. The personal nature of the artists' work offers an empathetic response, in contrast to the clinical coldness of much of modern western medicine. The theme was set when two exceptional large-scale projects by Ruth Adams and Cristin Millet were submitted to ATHICA during its open summer call period. Complementary works were later culled from a national call. Ruth Adams' and Cristin Millet's large-scale installations definitely qualify as 'brave art,' a term coined by the playwright Tony Kushner, and one which applies generally to the kind of art experience ATHICA has striven to bring the Northeast Georgia community during the three years since its inception. (This exhibit marks our third birthday.)

In Ruth Adams' *unremarkable*, we see how an artists' medium is at its most personal when it uses her own body. Adams, a nationally recognized artist and Assistant Professor of Photography at the University of Kentucky, documented her journey through Hodgkin's Lymphoma in over 350 large-format Polaroids (www.RuthAdamsPhotography.com). Motivated by "a desire to document (her) declining health" After being diagnosed in November 2002, Adams decided to make an image of herself every day for a year starting on the first day of her chemo treatment, December 20, 2002 and ending on the last, Jan 1, 2004. As the process alters her body, Adams captures her metamorphosis from sickness to health, allowing us to take that harrowing journey with her day by day, sometimes humorously and

always movingly. Remarkably, the piece ends on a hopeful note; in the artists' own words:

The amazing thing that happened through these images is that instead of a devastating decline in health, what actually came through is a rebirth. In the early images I looked dead inside, my eyes are empty, my body already ill from the cancer growing in my body. As the months progressed, yes the cancer pallor appeared and my hair started to fall out, but my spirit got stronger and stronger and it shows. This body of work will show everyone how beautiful and strong the soul is even when fighting for its life. At the moment I am done with treatments and cancer free. I am excited to show the world that cancer is no longer a death sentence, and that the treatments, although horrible are survivable.

Cristin Millet, an Assistant Professor of Art at Pennsylvania State University brings us *Teatro Anatomico*—an eight by nineteen by twenty-two foot elliptical sculptural installation that develops an interactive relationship with viewer. Millet's theme is the history of medicine as it relates to women's reproductive capacities, focusing specifically on the ever-controversial hysterectomy. Reckoning back to the anatomy theaters of the 16th century, Millet provides a provocative environment for meditation as you follow the pathway of forty-nine sheer chiffon panels lining the piece's three concentric circles. *Lightening*, a chandelier of cast rubber 'crystals' whose form reflects the female reproductive system, illuminates the spiral scrim pathway depicting historical illustrations of women exhibiting their reproductive systems, as well as related images by Botticelli and DaVinci. These draw the viewer into the surgical theater itself. Here, the tables are turned and the voyeur becomes the viewed. As viewers stand at the foot of, *Abdominal Hysterectomy: Dissection of the Observer*, a steel exam table with a cast rubber top, their faces are captured by a video camera and streamed live onto a video-loop of a prone female body periodically undergoing surgery. This powerful work surprises the audience by visually placing them on the operating table, asking them to think critically about the issues of privacy and voyeurism in medicine.

As Ms Millet puts it: "When in an anatomy theater, one has a heightened awareness of the inequality among the occupants, and one's role as "viewer" or "viewed" comes into question." This points to her larger goal of stimulating viewers to contemplate "how we perceive, stereotype, and stigmatize the female body and to question societal taboos surrounding sexuality and reproduction." Millet completed the piece during a three-month residency at the prestigious Sculpture Space in Utica, NY after several years of research into anatomy theaters in Italy, England, and the United States. As Sculpture Space director Gina Murtagh noted, Millet's content is amplified by her "background in metalsmithing and jewelry ... apparent in her intelligent choice of materials, obsessive attention to detail, and impressive handskills." (*Teatro Anatomico* comes to Athens between a run at the Esther Klein Art Gallery in Philadelphia and the International Museum of Surgical Science in Chicago.)

Angie Grass, local arts incubator-extraordinaire, is best known for organizing the Flicker Film Society in the 1990s, a non-commercial, grass-roots entity devoted to Super-8 filmmakers and their fans, which showed films regularly at the famous 40Watt club and subsequently spread to several other national sites (www.ibiblio.org/flickerfilms). Locally, her efforts morphed into the thriving Flicker Bar on Washington Street, where new and old experimental films as well as musical acts and art exhibits are still showcased. As a multi-disciplinary visual artist, Grass has shown locally for over a decade, albeit sporadically, and was also a founding members of The Daily Co-op grocery. Since being diagnosed with both Chronic Fatigue Immune Disorder Syndrome (CFIDS) and Fibromyalgia in 2001, she has managed, against all odds, to keep her formidable creative spirit alive by drawing funny and poignant graphic novels. This intimate medium allows us to hold the record of her experience in our hands as her images and words narrate her struggle with these debilitating illnesses. Especially for this exhibit, Grass incorporated wheels into three found objects, a chair, a cane and a crutch, poetic allusions to the interrelated issues of mobility and illness. Grass is also known as a sensitive and innovative musician on projects such as Flicker Orchestra and Weather Radio. Music critic John Britt wrote of Grass in *Flagpole Magazine* (June 1999):

Angie Grass' vocals slip out thoughtfully, drawing out a dollop of syllables as if spreading out the last teaspoon of preserves across her morning toast. It is also representative of the

group's approach to music, which vies for an almost cinematic approach towards forging sounds: not in a narrative sense, per se, but in a manner which uses a variety of elements to create a mood, a sense of location and being.

We are proud to debut Weather Radio's CD, aptly titled *the rest of weather radio*. The discs' nine delicate tracks, including the autobiographical *i need the rest*, were recorded, mixed and engineered by band member Chris Grehan just late last summer, four years' after the trio, which included Tom King, had officially disbanded. It will be available for listening during exhibit hours, as well as at a special CD listening and release party, which will include multi-media projection of slides and Super-8 films Ms Grass has assembled from Weather Radio's live shows. (Please see events schedule below.)

Four works in DV video explore artists' experience with illness and surgery. Milwaukee artist James Barany reveals his personal battle with morbid obesity in *My Most Important Self-Portrait* by utilizing an entrancing use of chalkboard drawings captured by stop-action animation. Like Adams' *unremarkable*, Barany documents his progress—in this case the goal is to lose 200 pounds—as well as his motivations, successes, and fears of the consequences of his failure. Expressive of her struggle and ultimate recovery from breast cancer, Doreen Laperdon-Addison (Neptune, NJ) combines modern dance choreography with video-collage in *Journey*, literally moving through scenery made of her medical records. David Kasdorf, former Yaddo and MacDowell fellow and current Assistant Professor of Integrative Arts at Pennsylvania State, allows viewers into the private world of an emotional crisis in *Cowboy*. Kasdorf thwarts the stereotypically stoic male response to emotional duress by putting soap in his eyes—triggering a physiological response that allows forced tears to give way to a very real expression of grief. Athens resident, wry absurdist, and ATHICA regular Kevin Hoth returns with *Anterior-Cruciate-Ligament-Asana*. His DV Video combines actual laproscopic camera footage of his 2001 Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) reconstruction knee surgery, superimposed over a video of Hoth practicing Ashtanga Yoga.

Other works address these themes using more abstract approaches, such as Seattle-based artist Ron Lambert, whose *Sterile Drape* creates a web of cast latex fingertips, reflecting on the tactile aspect of surgery. Lambert reminds us that as disconnected from the personal as modern surgery may appear, the relationship between surgeon and patient is an intimate one as a surgeon's touch is as "inside" as can be experienced. Malena Bergmann (Charlotte, NC) returns to ATHICA with two striking sculptures. *Listen (Hear)* combines heavy breathing, medical tubing, hair, earthworms and wax, among other materials, to create an interactive sculpture. *Requiem* uses many of these same medical and organic materials, confronting viewers with mortality and decay. This theme resonates through all Bergmann's work (her

memorably kinetic dead cat sculpture was in ATHICA's January 2003 *Visceral* exhibit). And lastly, Roger Reeves (Phenix City, AL) makes textured canvases and wall installations depicting cuts and sutures, bearing provocative titles referring to a series of mysterious numbered 'Episodes,' many humorous. With a slapstick deadpan, these canvases speak directly to the vulnerability of the skin barrier. Tenderly stitched and tinted, what might be repellent becomes hauntingly beautiful. We are very pleased that Reeves—a museum preparator by trade—has created *Wounded Walls*, a site-specific installation for us. Using three canvas, paint and plaster preparations to insert "wounds" directly in ATHICA's walls, Reeves investigated the idea that just as we experience hurt internally, a place sometimes carries the scars of those living inside its walls.

Bodies in Crisis offers us a rare opportunity to share in others' personal experiences with illness, surgery and recovery and through that encounter explore our own emotional relationship with physical trauma. Though our bodies may be fragile, these artists show us the strength we have to regenerate our spiritual and bodily selves through reflection, humor and aesthetic catharsis.

Caroline Cason, Board Member &
Lizzie Zucker Saltz, Director

Additional Curatorial Notes:

In Jeanette Winterson's novel *Written on the Body* (1992), the narrator seeks out medical texts to provide insight into the beloved's leukemiatic condition. Going beyond the typical romantic paeans to the beloved's hair, eyes, or skin, the narrator, "... would have her plasma, her spleen, her synovial fluid. I would recognize her even when her body had long since fallen away" (111). For the curators of *Bodies in Crisis*, this interest in the relationship between our biological selves and our less corporeal attributes comes into focus when the body is besieged by illness or altered in surgery.

Curators and art historians Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace note "It seems that the contemporary art world relishes the consequences of infringing bodily taboos. [But that] a different route lies in a more personal and intimate approach, particularly in recording the medical conditions of the artists themselves" (*Spectacular Bodies*, 156*).

We have chosen to spotlight this second path in exploring the theme of illness, surgery and recovery. Though the artists' experiences are at times traumatic, the underlying aim is to provoke empathetic reflection—the focus is on transformation rather than resignation.

We hope that our audience will participate bravely in this transformative process and, like our artists, find new perspective in our common experience of mortality. Returning to Winterson: "Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulation of a lifetime gathers there" (89).

Caroline Cason

*Kemp, Martin and Marina Wallace. *Spectacular bodies: the Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now*. London: Hayward Gallery, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.

It never fails to awe and inspire when individuals overcome adversity of any kind. But when the body's challenges threaten to overwhelm selfhood, contemporary artists' inclination to ignore age-old taboos surrounding the visibility of illness and seek out the unique opportunities creative work affords to heal their souls becomes, in turn, a gift to us. Through this gift of intimacy we are all brought closer to recognizing each other's humanity—a key to promoting a caring society.

Hannah Wilke's moving 1993 *Intra-Venus* is perhaps the most famous precursor to many of the works in this show; one which art critic Roberta Smith spoke of in an obituary whose themes could just as easily be applied to the works in this exhibit (gender issues notwithstanding):

There is plenty that is unbearable about these images, plenty that makes one want to turn away. Yet something about Wilke's presence is steadying and soothing. "You looked at me then," she seems to say. "Well, look at me now." Her challenge makes us consider once more, the way women are objectified by society and discarded as they become old or ill. But it also invites us to look at the essence of her art and her self—which was not her beauty, or her liberated sensuality or her narcissism. Rather it was an extraordinary degree of self-love, a simple pride of being that is difficult for anyone, but especially women, to muster. (An Artist's Chronicle of a Death Foretold, The New York Times, 1/30/1994).

I am pleased to be able to present artists whose "pride of being" allowed them to bring their visions to fruition. I am also honored to present artists of this caliber to the Northeast Georgia Community. I would like to thank them all for their personal bravery in pursuing patently un-saleable work, and to thank Ruth Adams and Cristin Millet especially for their willingness to bring their large works to our small corner of the world. I would also like to thank Caroline Cason for her dedication to ATHICA and enthusiasm for the curatorial process. Thanks are also due to all the individuals, local businesses, volunteers and Board Members who have supported ATHICA during our first three years, and to the members of FiveArt, Inc., who make ATHICA possible.

Lizzie Zucker Saltz, Director

GALLERY HOURS :
THURSDAY & FRIDAY- 3:00 - 9:00 P.M.
SATURDAY- 1:00 - 6:00 P.M.
SUNDAY- 3:00 - 6:00 P.M.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO GALLERY-SIT?
EMAIL VOLUNTEER@ATHICA.ORG

Checklist for BODIES IN CRISIS

Ruth Adams

unremarkable (2002-2004)

350+ large-format Polaroid photographs

James Barany

My Most Important Self-Portrait (2004)

DV video, 7 minutes

Malena Bergmann

Listen (Hear) (2000)

hair / earthworms / wax / medical tubing / beer bulb / dirt / velvet / metal, 28" x 10" x 10"

Requiem (2003)

wood, wax, medical tubing, needles, glass eye, gauze, clamps, latex, brass horn, 15' x 5' x 3'

Angie Grass

The Pain (2003)

My Eyes! I Can't See My Eyes! (2003)

graphic novels, 9" x 12"

Wheel chair

Wheel cane

Wheel crutch (2004)

altered found objects

Kevin Hoth

Anterior-Cruciate-Ligament-Asana (2004)

DV video, 1 hr. 12 minutes, 21 seconds

David Kasdorf

Cowboy (2001)

DV video, 31 minutes, 7 seconds

Doreen Laperdon-Addison

Journey (2004)

DV Video, 7 minutes

Ron Lambert

Sterile Drape (2004)

latex, metal, string, 14" x 24"

Cristin Millet

Teatro Anatomico (2004)

installation: aluminum pipe, 49 chiffon panels with inkjet-transferred imagery

8' x 19' x 22'

Components:

Lightening

cast aluminum, cast vinyl rubber crystals,

18" x 18" x 18"

Abdominal Hysterectomy: Dissection of the Observer

modified exam table, cast silicone rubber top,

video projection, and live stream imagery,

3' x 4' x 2'

Roger Reeves

Episode 9, Farewell to Angelina (All) (2004)

15" X 15"

Episode 11, Mythical Permanence

12" X 12"

Episode 21, Nails and Spit

21" X 21"

Episode 30, Desire and Need

24" X 11"

Episode 31, The Naked Debutante

18" X 19"

oil paint, string

Wounded Walls (2005)

site- specific wall installations :

oil paint and string on canvas, plaster, latex paint, 3 at approx. 5" each

Affiliated Events:

• Saturday, Feb 19th, 8:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Doors open at 7:30 p.m.

the rest of weather radio,

CD Release and listening party, with multi-media projections.

*A benefit for Angie Grass.

Suggested Donation \$6.00 - \$9.00

• Saturday, February 26th, 8:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Doors open at 7:30 p.m.

BODIES IN CRISIS Performance Art Night featuring:

Reaching for Anything; an original mono-drama, written & performed by Aaron Beeler

& an original Kevin Hoth performance piece.

Suggested Donation \$9.00 - \$13.00.

• Wednesday, March 2, 2005, 6:30 p.m.

Liberty: 3 Stories about Life & Death,

a documentary by Pam Walton

(Best Short Documentary, Paris Lesbian Film Festival, 2004).

Introduction by Annette Hatton of GLOBES

Co-sponsored by the UGA Libraries' Media Department and the

UGA Institute for Women's Studies

Free! *Note: Not at ATHICA, but in Room 214 of UGA's Student Learning Center.*

• Saturday, March 5, 2005, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Celebrate ATHICA's 3rd Birthday

& Kick-Off Women's History Month!

Music performance by Amy Dykes

of I Am the World Trade Center & DJs Twin Powers,

*A portion of the proceeds will go to Amy Dykes.

Suggested Donation \$6.00 - \$16.00

ATHICA IS AN ALL-VOLUNTEER RUN, 501(C)(3) NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION, WHICH OPENED IN MARCH 2002.YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS, ARE NEEDED AND ARE FEDERALLY TAX-DEDUCTIBLE.

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