

Never Pass a Mirror Without Looking in it

by

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
List of Figures.....	3
Abstract.....	5
Acknowledgement.....	5
Thesis.....	6-18
Exhibition Images.....	19-23
Footnotes.....	24
Workscited.....	25-27

List of figures

Breanne Siwicki

Face, 2019

Satin Print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - one, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - two, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - three, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - four, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - five, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - six, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - seven, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - eight, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki

Mirror of the body - nine, 2019

Sintra, Crystal film ink jet print

Breanne Siwicki
Moving Body- one, 2019
Polaroid

Breanne Siwicki
Moving Body- two, 2019
Polaroid

Breanne Siwicki
Moving Body- three, 2019
Polaroid

Breanne Siwicki
Moving Body- four, 2019
Polaroid

Breanne Siwicki
Moving Body- five, 2019
Polaroid

Breanne Siwicki
Moving Body- six, 2019
Polaroid

Abstract

Our bodies face continuous stress throughout a lifetime, physically and mentally deteriorating and changing as we age. As humans, we each have a unique vessel and I am in a constant state of wishing to preserve my own. *Never Pass a Mirror Without Looking in It* is an exhibition consisting of manipulated Polaroid images. There are nine floor-based installation works that are meant to be walked through and around. Viewers are urged to strain their bodies in order to search for a figure within each piece. Breanne grew up in Winnipeg Manitoba where she spent the majority of her life as part of the Manta Swim club. This seventeen-year career, that included representing Canada in swimming competitions all over the world, became a huge influence on her artistic practice.

Acknowledgements

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“Never Pass a Mirror Without Looking in it”. This title directly references movements resulting from the desire to look at oneself, a simple glance, a full turn of the body. It alludes to the spectacle of capturing yourself within a moment that is only ever visible through a mirror or a photograph. Our bodies face continuous stress throughout a lifetime, physically and mentally deteriorating and changing as we age. As humans, we each have a unique vessel and I am in a constant state of wishing to preserve my own. A body, made up of skin and bones, holds our most precious materials. The brain has a magical capacity to capture memory, vision, movement and human experience, similar to how photography captures moments of time. This is a dichotomy that intrigues me, and influences my artistic expression. My photography works are abstract images of human bodies that I use to capture and manipulate a moving world that stands still with a photograph. In pinpointing small moments of my own personal movement, I aim to showcase a greater schedule of motion and the activities in which I partake. Specifically, I am fascinated by seemingly healthy movements that can be all consuming, which in turn produce something that is unhealthy. Mary Kelly wrote in “Desiring images/imaging desire,” that the phenomenological body takes precedence; what belongs to me, my body, the body that is self-possessing subject whose guarantee of artistic truth is grounded in “actual experience,” often deploying “painful state” as a signature for that ephemeral object.”¹

My interest in body movement stems from seventeen years of training and competing as a swimmer, which encompassed so much of my everyday life. As a swimmer I became fixated on body image, and at the time personally felt that weight and size was directly related to my speed in the water. Upon my retirement, I have cultivated a deepened understanding of the connections that exist between my identity as a woman, swimmer, and artist. In my previous artistic work, I reflected upon my life as an elite athlete, the realities associated with that life, and personal

insecurities that spawned from my swimming career to create body-positive, self-positive photographic projects. Since that time, I have focused on capturing, through photography, subjects that have endured a similar path. Despite its negative aspects, the experience of competitive swimming generated new forms of questioning and strength. In navigating a post-athletic life, my work became an outlet for deconstructing ideas of who we are and what people want to make out of life, emphasizing that we are more than a physical body, and in this case, part of a sport. In my early work, I began toning my portraits based on emotion and identifying factors, with the goal of communicating that no one has to be defined based on physical outcomes, but rather inner outcomes. The uses of water and photography have long collaborated within my work many times, as a swimmer being submerged in water was a daily occurrence and submitting my images through the same process became an outlet for understanding the display of the body on view in the water. Through connecting my personal experiences from the sport of swimming and with my interests in imaging forms of the body of self-representation, I intend to build a connection between daily activities, aging, and movement.

In my artwork, I ultimately strive to represent my presence on earth as a female figure and by documenting an exploration of how my body movement is going to grow and affect this vessel as time moves forward. I consider the work I have created to be representational self reflection of my body in its current state, which still bear frequent pains as experienced in my competitive career. As someone who uses photography, I am using models that I have similar experiences with; these models stand in and represent a self-reflective portrait. This includes capturing individuals that have also been high performance athlete within my age frame. The position I hold behind the camera allows me to control my intended representation of the human form. In photographing subjects that I feel deeply connected with, I am able to project how my

own body feels at a given point in time. I am drawn to those that have continually mutated and evolved as a result of a physical exchange, paralleling the fluctuating body issues that I have experienced throughout my life as an athlete. Although my use of athletes within my photographs is unapparent to the viewer, due to the abstraction of each image, utilizing models that have experienced similar paths of this particular sport are crucial to my artistic expression as I can reference them to my own image, therefore creating a self-portrait. The faceless portrait photography can have just as much impact as ones that feature strong expressions. Highlighting other parts of the body, like hands, posture, hair, and brain is in itself, self-portraiture². Emphasizing these features is the focal point of my work, and is achieved through the faceless portrait. These portraits hold figures within them, though the abstractive nature leads you search for an acceptably recognizable image. Artist Genieve Figgis once mentioned “all my favourite artworks have figures in them,”³ A quote I accredit validation for my continued searching of a recognizable figure.

The work I have created during my time as an MFA student has been a play on what I consider to be a self-reflective portrait, and I plan to continue this trajectory throughout my career as an artist. Currently, I am working with different deconstructive processes in order to continue to enter with ideas, mostly concentrated around conflicts within the concerns of over usage of the body, physical barriers and complications we face that result from the movements we choose to partake in throughout our lives. I began this body of work with a focus on viewing the human body as an enduring vessel with multiple capabilities. These capabilities begin to slow down at a certain age in life, the idea of death or with physical complications of our inevitable future. I contemplate how the activities we subject ourselves to will either enable complication with the body in the future, or create a sustained endurance.

In acknowledging my identity as not just an athlete, but also as a female athlete, I am able to make a greater connection with this desire to possess an “idealistic” female body. Female bodies, genitalia, hair, human brains, human bones, and photographic materials, all generate conversations in which material properties and societal exercise create vicious cycles of coping, which entail a further breakdown of the body. My interpretations are referenced from my own personal experiences and the severely unhealthy constraints bestowed upon the body in order for success.

Reflecting on multiple years of unhealthy training and nutrition habits, I have dedicated my artistic practice to searching for a happy medium in health related activities. In this work, I am creating a conceptual entry point of the personal, yet global relationships people have with their identities and their bodies. I am interested in a body's evolution and transformation, and am intrigued by the process in which we reach the point of the signs, of ephemerality of our physical bodies in this world. These are just a few of the many questions that my exhibition “Never Pass a Mirror Without Looking in it” poses. I am interested in pursuing conversations of not only what it means to be a woman who has endured countless hours of repetitive active movement, but also how women view themselves within society.

By documenting intimate details of the female human body, my work can be construed as a form of objectification as women have been viewed for the purpose of entertainment and pleasure throughout the course of history. In my work, however, photographing close-up images of personal moments is to be seen as an act of empowerment. My female subjects bestow me with their trust, vulnerability and consent, establishing a level of full autonomy, which in turn works to reclaim this longstanding narrative.

Marilyn Minter's work and artistic lens is something that I wish to adapt within my own work. Our individual artistic expressions share similar elements, specifically regarding our use of close-up images. Her images are large-scale paintings that involve multiple elements, such as the female body, fluids and glass. They are usually flooded with ambiguity, leaving the viewer to there our own devices, and rendering connotations that are not always pleasant or inviting.⁴ As a female painter and photographer, she often receives criticism against her explicitly sexual work, which causes her to question the origin of the public's discomfort with the body and sexuality.⁵ Other artists who have influenced my practice due to the use self-portraiture as a staple in their artistic practices include Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol, and the early works by Ana Mendieta. Cindy Sherman, a pioneer within the art of photography and primarily for self-portraiture, finds her inspiration from pop culture, fashion and film.⁶ Like Marilyn Minter, she challenges the restrictive roles of women in the media and the objectification of female sexuality. She is often labeled a feminist, and many other labels, but Sherman is resistant to being categorized.⁷

I do not consider myself to be a photographer, but an artist who works with multiple materials. After embedding projected experience into these works, I consider them to be objects. I consider myself a painter, as I rely on pigment and the abstraction of the emulsion from the inside of a Polaroid. I do not limit myself from adding color within my initial process, and am able to add pigmented materials within the transfer process due to the soaking of the emulsions, which require delicate care and time due to their fragility. Each piece requires multiple drying times. I have also used a form of painting onto my transparencies. The inkjet images sit on the surface of the material, and therefore can be broken up and embedded with paint and pigments. This also creates a texture of dry skin.

My work is process-based and continuously changing, which allows me to have the capacity to try and work towards developing new techniques. To create images starting with analog technology, and then adopting unconventional forms of manipulation. In past I have worked with film and manipulated black and white prints with different forms of toning. By adding in dye, paint and other pigments I able to imbed color into photographic paper and inkjet transparencies. From then on I have worked with the manipulation of inkjet transparency prints, these images come from scans of different analogue photography methods. Currently I have developed a process in which I can manipulate the new Polaroid Originals technology.

Each work within my current exhibition begins with a Polaroid. I take each image through stages of vigorous manipulation to create an object. The images are processed in water and the emulsion is lifted from its casing and transferred onto glass, thus creating a Polaroid transfer. After they have dried, the transfer is then scanned and printed on an inkjet transparency.

There are a total of sixteen images that are placed within the exhibition “Never Pass a Mirror Without Looking in it”, inspired by my swimming career. Nine floor based images, six framed Polaroid’s and one wall hanging made of Satin wall mounted.

Nine of these images exist as a series of objects on the floor, images of an abstracted representation form of the body. There is a path to walk through of the series of objects; the viewer is required to physically move through the space in order to observe the exhibit. On display on the floor, the viewer is required to look down and walk around, all while being aware of their surroundings, being careful as to not bump into adjacent objects or pieces. Each image is strategically placed on the floor in order to view the object at an odd angle. My work is a place of constraint, to mimic the use of the body in an everyday uncomfortable situation, for example exercise, and other repetitive actions. In order for the image to be seen in its full object form, one

must walk around the image over and over again in search of the final figure within the image. Experiencing physical movements of viewing is required to make a connection with the movement of the body. There is a certain level of effort required from the viewer, with some images being completely unrecognizable due to the abstraction the search could be constant. This work offers an inside look to the experience of creating physical barriers for the body.

Each image within this exhibition has reference to the body, a full ominous figure, an eye, and parts of the brain, skin reference and movement of the body. There are images that are primarily flesh-colored, exhibiting a pink-like skin tone, which are usually myself. The images used on the floor objects are printed on transparencies. This material allows the transfer to act as if it's my own skin, rather than a photograph. Each image is thirty inches by thirty inches and is placed on a white square based made of Sintra. The images come to the edge of the base in order to take up the entire white square. The floor objects have a glossy finish that creates reflection of other areas of the exhibition, as well as including being able to see oneself reflection. The glossy finish mimics the use of glass used in the original Polaroid transfer the glass represents a liquid, which makes the connection being able to see myself in the mirror of the water within the swimming pool. The mirror as a pool was a reflection that I saw day after day as I prepared to move within the water while I was a swimmer. In observing the exhibit, I invite the viewer to question what the image is made of, and how I achieved the distressed look of a Polaroid Transfer

The six framed Polaroid images have a strong female presence and are the last works seen in the exhibition. You arrive after the walk through of the floor bases. The bases are unrecognizable as Polaroid until later on in the show, where there are six Polaroid's framed to make the connection of how the Polaroid went through the stages of manipulation, my goal is for

the viewer to contemplate how the distressed look of the images was created and conclude that Polaroid was the original image after arriving to the intact-framed Polaroid's. These images are less abstract from the floor-based series; however, there is a level of in-camera manipulation in each image.

The final stand-alone image in the exhibition is a large satin wall hanging. This image is a self-portrait of myself, and one of the only recognizable self-portraits within the show. Every time the gallery door opens a slow motion of the fabric sways on its own. Its individuality stands in as myself when I am not present. The work's fluidity and the sheen of the satin fabric imitate flowing water. Just as if a face were to be submerged and water were to be sweeping over the figure.

My use of Polaroid film is crucial to the artistic meaning within my work. Polaroid is a technology developed in the 1940s by Edwin Land. The purpose of instantaneous spontaneous photography was to be able to see and physically have the image in a very short amount of time. The film developed into a photograph before people's eyes. The use of Polaroid is relevant as it's a physicality object just as we compare to a physical body.

Artists have long used Polaroid within their art. Some used it to create portraits. Artists such as David Hockney, who created montages out of multiple images placed together in a grid.⁸ Another artist who used Polaroid, who influenced my practice is Lucas Samaras. Samaras shot sx-70 film, as the film was drying he manipulated the images with colour dyes and an old movement technique and manipulated the emulsion as it was developing.⁹ In relation to capturing moments of time and life, Andy Warhol captured moments of his own existence, partaking in mundane activities.

Ana Mendieta acted out a number of performances that dealt with the questioning and stereotypical notions of female beauty. In 1972, she performed “Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints)”, in which she abstracted her body and face by pressing it against Plexiglas.¹⁰ Her use of the body on plexiglass is mimicked within my expression of Polaroid.

Whereas the majority of the artists previously mentioned used the original Polaroid technology, I utilize a newer model of film. A start-up company titled Impossible revamped their own Instant photography technology and later evolved into the company “Polaroid Originals” and released the OneStep +.¹¹ This new camera can be linked up with Bluetooth to the Polaroid Originals phone app, which unlocks a range of new creative photography tools, including double exposure and light painting.¹² I am utilizing this new technology in my work to create abstracted Polaroid’s, of the human figure. This technology is vital as this film has a quality that allows me to remove the emulsion from the casing via soaking. The film that was created prior to 2008 has been tested and does not act as this film does. The new Polaroid technology is an important tool for my practice, as it analogizes the connection between the eyes and brain, intersecting with the creation of memory. This film is also unforgiving. It is very sensitive, similar to the human body, whereas the occurrence of a slight miscalculation results in compromised images.

The exhibition I have completed seeks to emphasize vision as one of the strongest human senses. Our eyes are directly connected to the brain, and are essential in memory formation.¹³ The hippocampus is the part of the brain that allows for our ability to have memory,¹⁴ with the eyes being our sight connection to the brain. Cameras and human eyes have similar abilities to capture images, though one is a technological device and the other is a biological mechanist. The cornea is a clear layer that sits on the surface of the eye, and acts similarly to a camera lens, also

a clear object that sits on the body of a camera. Aperture is the opening in the lens that light travels through into the camera sensor. In connection to the eye, our iris functions similarly to the aperture, as it shrinks and grows to suit our lighting situation. Our brain works similarly to a camera, freezing and capturing images in our head and stored as memory. It is an act of assembly with numerous areas within the brain contributing their own distinct part.

Just as a camera's aperture functions within a lens, light bounces off an object and travels to the eye, first making contact with the cornea. From the cornea, light travels through the iris and from there through the lens where light is focused to fovea of the retina. The fovea is a small part in the middle of the retina and has the highest visual activity. The fovea works with different cones in the eye and is the primary part of the retina that creates the possibility to see different frequencies of light. The eye sees red green and blue light similar to a camera sensor. The camera interacts with its photoreceptors and responds to specific colors. Humans have photoreceptors that respond to blue, green and red. Once the visuals reach the eye, which information then leaves the eye and is transfer to the optic nerve. The optic nerve from each eye cross at the optic chiasm and it is here that the brain receives the information from each eye. The left and right information is crossed and then transformed into one. The brain is the most perfected instrument in the world, a complex machine we rely on entirely. The brain acts as a living camera, the rawest imagery besides the instantaneous image.

The movement of the body connects back to the brain. When you decide that a part of your body is to preform a specific task, the brain sends a message through the spinal cord and peripheral nerves to the muscles, causing them to contract. Therefore when you partake in sports, it becomes more complex and messages from the brain are more involved and need to be synchronized.

Our skin is the most external layer of the body; it has an absorbent aspect and provides evidence of all the experiences of our life. Skin is the shell of our body, our protective layer. As we grow older the skin stretches, grows thinner and aging spots appear. The primary stage of aging is seen from our skin. Our skin begins to change in our mid twenties. Collagen, a protein makeup in our skin, begins to slow its production. This causes the elasticity to be less effective as we continue to age. When dead skin cells are replaced with new cells, the skin becomes weaker, thus looks wrinkled, thin, and transparent. These themes are paralleled within a Polaroid transfer; as the texture of the images resembles weathered skin. Similar to skin, a Polaroid represents the “outer shell” of the memories and experiences captured within an image.

The body in a story to inform, I use the visual interpretation of the body in each of my images. I find that using Polaroid makes my work a spontaneous composition. The makeup of an image reflects a specific key point of a specific bodily feature. Photographing a like-minded body reveals the internal struggles and desires of a person, conveyed through emotion. Documenting the body as it grows reminds me of documenting identity and confusion. I am embracing a realisation of vulnerability as a means of purpose.

An active lifestyle requires a strenuous amount of movement. The lifestyle of a professional athlete causes a detrimental amount of excursion on the physicality of the human body. As a swimmer I exercised every day, two to three times per day. After witnessing various injuries throughout my time as an athlete, I immediately thought of the future: as complications occur within and to bodies now, how will they affect us in thirty years? High-level athletes are putting joints through various extreme repetitive motions, such as swimming, where shoulder rotation needs to be hyper flexible in order to compete at certain levels. Common swimming related injuries affect the shoulders, knees, hips, or back, depending on stroke. Overuse of the

body leads fatiguing of the muscles. Slight injuries that go ignored cause the shoulders to become unstable and lead to pain and further injury.

There are stories and themes of aging and self-acceptance that everyone can relate to. At every moment, as we grow older, our bodies are continuously changing. Physically and mentally we change, and we grow and change at different rates. These activities we partake in from a small age, to a growing age, have implications for the future. There are positive moments, when at the age of six we are taught that sport and exercise is the key element to health. When health and exercise becomes a job and a chore that hinders us physically. As aging comes, I only hope that I, personally, can accept what is to come, when my shoulders wear out from the millions of strokes that I have taken from the age of six to twenty- two. I found that my body is a fascinating vessel and I, both as an individual and as a physical performer, I'm delighted to see that I am capable of exerting so much pressure on the body, though I feel privileged that I can document its future.

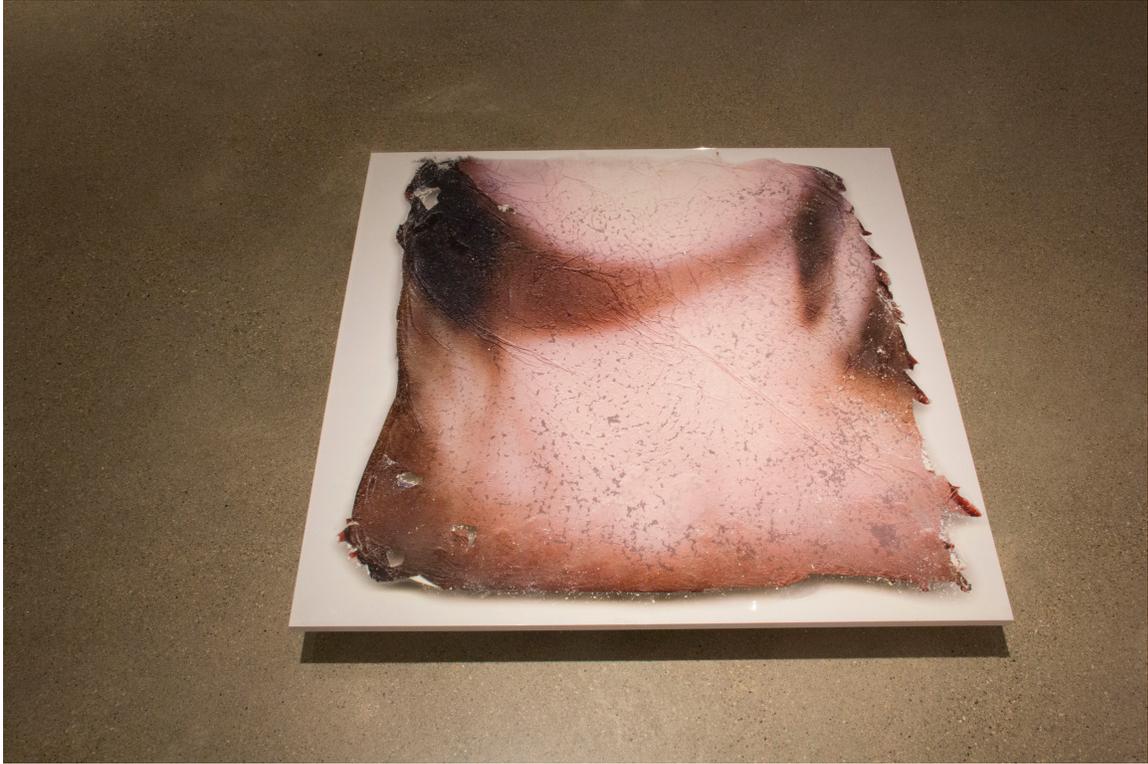


Figure 1 (Mirror of the Body- One)



Figure 2 (Mirror of the Body-Two)



Figure 3 (Face)



Figure 4 (Exhibition)



Figure 5 (Exhibition)



Figure 6 (Exhibition)

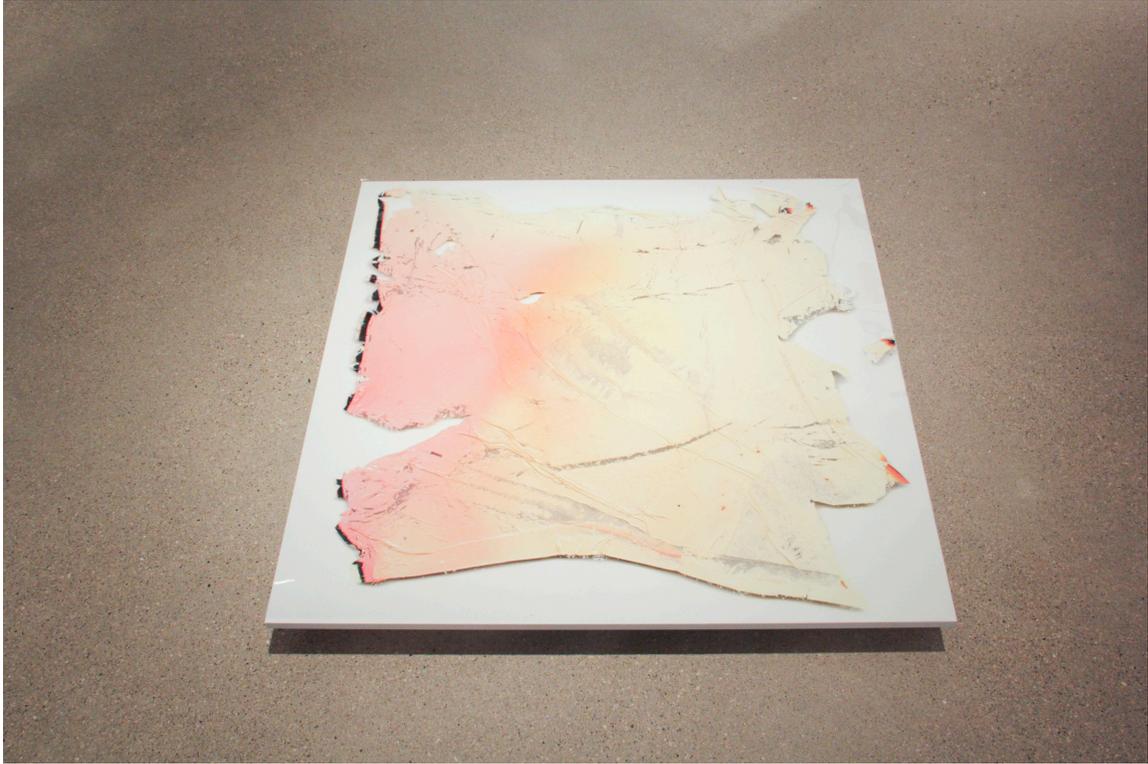


Figure 7 (Mirror of the Body- Three)



Figure 8 (Mirror of the Body-Five)

End Notes

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