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A Conversation with Ariana Page Russell



Heat Wave, 2008, ©Ariana Page Russell

The Greek thinker Epicurus described images as incredibly thin films, eidola, which are constantly, rapidly shed from objects. When these thin films land in our eyes, we perceive the object from which they came. I imagine Russell frantically applying her skin tattoos, layering skin on skin so as not to be left bare when the eidola of her own surface is cast off. Is that what the camera captures when it takes a person's picture?

Standing in front of Ariana Page Russell's prints at Gallery 4Culture, my mind can't help but jump to the old cliché "Beauty is only skin deep." Beauty is surface. But here traditional blonde beauty becomes the backdrop on which Russell intervenes, bringing her skin to the surface. She photographs her skin, transforms it into temporary tattoos, reapplies the skin tattoos to her body, and photographs the result.



Belle Etoile, 2008, ©Ariana Page Russell

I come back to Beauty. It's a battle-worn question, but unavoidable when an artist trains her camera, lights, and makeup on a nude female body, even if that body is her own. I'm drawn to the photographs where Russell's intervention wobbles the beauty ideal on which it rests. For example, *Heat Wave* reminds me of Man Ray's Glass Tears, but the fleshy mouth hints at more than just artistic cannibalism. In *Belle Etoile* Russell grafts custom wallpaper of her skin onto one of the gallery walls. If the camera captured a likeness, now the print releases it again, shedding thin flakes of skin imagery into the world.

Nymphoto: Tell us a little about yourself

Ariana Page Russell: Art and education are very important to me, as is integrating these things into daily life. I love communication and bodies--things that make us human. And I like to have fun.

NP: How did you discover Photography?

APR: In 1996 I took a photography class at Truckee Meadows Community College because my mom gave me her old Minolta X700 camera. I fell in love with the process and continued taking classes when I transferred to the University of Nevada, Reno a few years later. I became interested in the conceptual nature of photography and with the support of some amazing professors, switched my major from psychology to photography, getting my BFA in 2003.



Blanch, 2008, ©Ariana Page Russell

NP: Where do you find inspiration?

APR: My skin and the unexpected responses it has inspire me to be spontaneous, vulnerable, and accepting. I used to get really frustrated at my easily blushing skin but now love its transparency. I hope to inspire others to embrace the flaws and beauty of their bodies.

MAGNANMETZ GALLERY

NP: How did this project come about?

APR: Dressing came about as I refine my ideas of how to capture a blush. Externalized emotions become their own sort of fashion, a fashion of skin, so I created 'clothing' with temporary tattoos made from collages of photographs of skin. I print the images of skin as c-prints, cut those into various shapes, then mount the shapes to panel in varying patterns. Then I scan the panels and turn them into temporary tattoos, putting my skin back on my body.

NP: What's next?

APR: I'm very interested in pursuing the performative aspects of my work. It's been scary for me to show my face in these new images but now that I've conquered that fear I'd like to try being present in the space of my work in a new way via performance. This is still developing...

In early 2009 I'm moving to New York City so I imagine a new environment will impact my work as well.

NP: Thank you Ariana, and good luck with your move!



Corsage, 2008, ©Ariana Page Russell