

The Body Project: Anatomy, Relationships, and Representation
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WE ARE NOT OUR FACES

One of the themes prevalent in my work is that the notion of “self” as separate from “other” is a mental construct. According to our senses we are separate and on those levels, we are. However, if we examine ourselves on a subatomic level, for example, we learn that our bodies are in continuous flux. On a subatomic level, there is no way to clearly differentiate between our bodies and the surrounding air. Many spiritual traditions, such as Zen Buddhism, make similar claims. Thich Nhat Hanh (1997), Zen monk and author, addresses this in terms of time:

One day as I was about to step on a dry leaf, I saw the leaf in the ultimate dimension. I saw that it was not really dead, but that it was merging with the moist soil in order to appear on the tree the following spring in another form. (p. 151)

According to this teaching, we must recognize that on some levels, such as on the subatomic and metaphysical levels, we are not separate from one another.

I examined the idea of “self and other” in "There is Only One Face." I installed a sheet of two-way mirror-pane into a gallery wall like a window. On one side of the wall, viewers could walk up to the mirror-pane. On the other side of the wall, hidden from view, I stood just the right distance to match the size of the visitor’s face. Through the adjustment of light, I created a situation in which at first glance viewers saw their own image in the glass and after a few seconds, noticed my ghostlike features from the other side of the wall, merging with theirs in the mirror-pane – a synthesized image that was neither entirely mine, nor entirely theirs. At this point, they developed into interactors with the work as I mimicked their movements and facial gestures in an attempt to give them a realistic “reflection.” They were looking at themselves and at me simultaneously. And I was doing the same. The artist was the artist, artwork and viewer. The viewer was also the artist, artwork and viewer.

In "There is Only One Face," I disrupted what we usually see as “self” and “other.” I explored the challenges encountered when this belief runs up against personal experience and how we respond to that experience. Participants remarked on their own reactions as much as on the materials in play. Responses ranged from avoidance: “I can’t handle this right now,” to playing with our shared images for an extended period of time. Many people looked behind themselves to see if I was a projection. Some thought I was not a real person in the mirror. This work was meant to be an exercise in seeing the self as a mental construct and I altered normal conditions in order to question that mental

construct. The intention in this work was to break down the assumptions we have of “self” and “other.”

"There is Only One Face" explored the attachments we may have to our bodies, and our faces in particular, especially when defining our sense of self. We became a social experiment, realizing that we are not our faces.