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Priscilla Frank, February 4 2016



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ARTS & CULTURE

Female Photographers Discuss The Real Anxieties Of Being Women

Warning: This post contains nudity and may be inappropriate for work.

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Priscilla Frank f t
Arts Writer, The Huffington Post



JUNO CALYPSO, A DREAM IN GREEN, 2013

"A woman must continually watch herself," critic John Berger wrote in *Ways of Seeing*. "One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."

As a bona fide woman, I get the feeling. I've learned to both understand and subtly combat the way I envision myself looking to an outsider, when groggily preparing coffee first thing in the morning — hair disheveled, eyes at half mast. So many actions are subconsciously played back to me in my imagination as they are happening, as if I'm constantly watching the movie of my own life. In this way, women are intuitive image-makers, constantly creating and starring in their own ever-shifting visions.

A photography exhibition entitled "[The Real Thing](#)," featuring artists Juno Calypso, [Natasha Carvana](#), [Pixy Yijun Liao](#) and [Melanie Willhite](#), is dissecting the various ways that appearance and reality become entangled in art and life. Dealing with identity, relationships, gender and sexuality, the artists explore the alien peculiarities from a distinctly feminine point of view.



JUNO CALYPSO, 12 REASONS YOU'RE TIRED ALL THE TIME, 2013

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London-based Jane Caplan transforms hotel bedrooms and pink tiled bathroom into dystopian landscapes. Amplifying the anxiety of priming oneself in surrealist exteriors, Caplan's photographs are part 20th-century photographer Francesca Woodman, part "The Beaches, Getting Ready, Sleep."

In her process, mirrors reflect the images of women into infinite selves, mimicking the scrutiny with which many of us examine ourselves. "I can trace my obsession with mirrors to when I used to take with my grandma's black vinyl mirror." Caplan explained to The Huffington Post. "I'd stick my face in it and close the panels around my face to create an infinite room of mirroring heads."

"From the age of 12 to 21, I developed an anxious regime of beauty rituals," Caplan continued. "Being young and literally unaware most of these took place in a bedroom or bathroom - the type of room I made all of my work in now. Preparation for an occasion could and would frequently begin three days in advance. Everything would be washed, plucked, dehydrated and shaved. Layers of fake tan, butters and mousses would be applied, acrylic nails would be added, hair extensions and eyelashes glued in. It was a very hot and sticky process. By the end you'd feel like a slippery bronze ball attempting to walk on land."



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My grandma always calls putting on makeup "putting her face on," alluding to the many ways women endure to become "themselves." Maybe it's this commitment to image-making or a daily task, Caplan suggests, that turns women into artists. "We're used to crafting something and are willing to put in work till we achieve what we want to see."

While Caplan's images are fantastical and uncanny, **Netelady Consueco** works in a documentary style, keenly photographing uncomprising details of her dates with married men. Consueco finds her smelting subjects on online dating sites designed for affair and lust.

Her love together to discover their motivations for cheating. While some are purely sexual, many of the men express patterns of loneliness or alienation that lead them to infidelity.

Her photographs are presented like clues of a prime scene, capturing a pivotal encounter founded entirely on deceit. The husbands turn to their wives. The wives see to her subjects. And yet, a certain authenticity slips through the images, captured in the moment.





Working somewhere between documentary and fiction is **Peggy Lee**, whose series 'Experimental Relationship' captures her and her partner in a variety of poses based loosely on real life. The premise of the series stems from Peggy's Chinese upbringing, in which the ideal romantic partner was an older, authoritative and protective figure. Now, collaborating with her partner Max, who is five years younger, Peggy toys with the expectations and realities of romantic partnerships.

In one image, Peggy acts as the protector while a naked Max clings to her neck, almost like a child. Her images subvert the typical male/female relationship into its more nuanced iterations – the momenta girlfriend is powerful, boyfriend is soft, girlfriend is scared, boyfriend is needy.

"The photographs in 'Experimental Relationship' are not a documentation of our real relationship," Peggy has reflected. "It's more as an idea exploration of my thoughts on relationships. Sometimes I'm trying to describe our relationship. Sometimes it's the things that would love to do but cannot really do it in real life."



Melanie Nishida, on the other hand, creates imaginary memories of romantic relationships in her series "Sleeping Beauties (The Box Under the Bed)." Exploring the ways photographic documents can subvert the real, Nishida meticulously crafts four vintage photos, complete with air-kissed personalized messages, fingerprints, glue stains, watermarks and other artificial imprints of time. The purposefully obscured objects conjure memories of moments, narratives that never were, while exploring the artifice always already attached to romantic moments.

For Peggy the four artists in the exhibit almost represent four distinct stages of a woman's life. "I think all of the four artists' work in the show are autobiographical in some way... Fred, Tracy's

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"Just's work as a single young woman. Then there's my work of being with somebody. And later it's Natalia's work of being after, in the end, there's Natalia's work on the aftermath of the relationship."

Together with the Calypso, Lash and Caruana construct distinct interconnections on a single theme: reality, in whatever mediated, constructed shape it may appear. "The Road (July)" is on view until February 07, 2016 at Powers Gallery in New York.

June Calypso



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Female Photographers

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The New York Times photo of the woman in the floral dress.



The New York Times photo of the woman in the floral dress.

From "Experimenting Relationships" project.

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