All That We See(m)

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ALL THAT WE SEE(M)

by

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A THESIS

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ALL THAT WE SEE(M)

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Born open-eyed, ready to take stock of our surroundings from the first breath, no other sense so largely informs our understanding of the world as sight. The ability to visually process our environment may seem extremely straightforward to those long accustomed to its instinctive use. However, there is more to seeing than the pure mechanics of visual perception. Since we live, not in a static environment, but one of constant change and motion, our knowledge of the world around us comes in fragments, shifting flashes of color, shape, and movement that coalesce through the active process of vision. In these dynamic conditions, everything is in flux. Even the human figure, so frequently viewed as a set, iconic form, is subject to continuous transformation. Our impression of the body alters from interaction to interaction, as it moves in space and time, simultaneously changing shape, perspective, and orientation.

Bearing in mind this state of perpetual fluidity, my work attempts to dismantle the idea of the solid, fixed body.

In rejecting the idea that we are static and self-contained, I am interested in exploring the internal and external divisions of the human form and its environment. In my work, I use webs of repeated marks to create impressions of figures that appear permeable and open to their surroundings. This repetitive mark making provides me with a system for understanding the form through an organized exploration that measures out the figure line by line. Though focused, this process of mapping grows organically,
starting from observed points and expanding to fill in what is unknown or unseen. The ability to mold such disjointed information into the semblance of a whole, recognizable individual, comes from the capacity of the mind to stitch together the scattered pieces with such deftness that we fall into the illusion that we are concrete, fixed points, rather than changing forms. However, perception isn’t a set and uniform capability. In my eyes, the piecemeal process by which we experience the world doesn’t resolve itself from the manifold to the complete. While some information is pieced together—such as a gait, hairstyle, or an unusual pair of eyebrows—my impression of the figure remains largely fragmented. I seek to capture this shifting and fractured view through the varying distinctness of the figure against its environment, the veracity of form, and by expressing only select features, rather than depicting every part of the body with equal attention.

Despite being a commonly shared ability, perception is highly individualized. On top of the physical reality that everyone experiences events from separate vantage points, we all process visual information through unique mental pathways, and compared to our own personal catalog of experiences. It is those vagaries of individual perception that I find compelling. In addition to imparting my own view, I wish to invite the viewer to consider his or her own perceptions of others while appreciating the vast variation within how we process the world around us. I want to counter the idea that there is only one standard for perception or that one way of seeing is better than another. Ultimately, a changing and fragmented view isn’t a failing, but a shared truth. It is in drawing together the scattered visual elements that a viewer becomes imaginatively involved, and it is in those spaces between that creativity lives.
*All That We See(m)*

Alison VanVolkenburgh