

The Ecstasy of Mary Shelley at LACE

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Taking its title from two stories of profound transformation, *The Ecstasy of Mary Shelley* fills LACE with a lugubrious installation of works by Los Angeles artists that feels appropriate to the political cataclysms of 2017. Between the religious highs of the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* and the monstrous overtones of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the common ground presented by the objects on view centers firmly around the body, its representation, and its intimation.

Figures abound throughout the dimly-lit gallery, including those of the live incubated silkworms in Candice Lin's *The Worm Husband (Our Father)* (2016) and in Cassils' video *Tiresias* (2013), in which the artist presses themself against an icy Greek male torso, melting it gradually to reveal the artist's nude form. Bodies are implied in Nathan Danilowicz's imposing *Volans Anguli* (2016), an installation of pitch-black L-beams that dwarf onlookers as they weave between them. The intestinal raw sausage casings that curl around a ziggurat in Naotaka Hiro's *Night and Fog, Tubes on Black Mountain* (2010), and the devastating Holocaust film alluded to by the video's title, offer a darker version of visceral confrontation.

Does the exhibition mark a contemporary return to figuration? In reality it never left, particularly in L.A., with its history of body-based performances that gestured toward enlightened consciousness (Chris Burden, Barbara T. Smith) and MOCA's 1992 exhibition *Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s*, which canonized the likes of Paul McCarthy as venerable proponents of the abject. *The Ecstasy of Mary Shelley* aims to plant itself somewhere between these two interlocking strains; despite its curators' use of moody atmosphere to dramatically emphasize mystery and transcendence, the overall pungency of the works on view remains grounded—auspiciously so—in the baser, physical qualities of human existence in which these artists clearly revel.

The Ecstasy of Mary Shelley is on view January 4–February 12, 2017 at LACE (6522 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90028).