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# BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS

It is common for the menstrual cycles of women who occupy the same home or workplace to become synchronized. Similarly, the intellectual, emotional and intuitive rhythms of artists who share studios, housing or intimate friendships can also become attuned. It doesn't take long before variations on the same artistic influences, impulses and experiments show up in individual and collaborative endeavors. One influence that informed Julia Prudhomme's preliminary curatorial vision for *Looks* at the Campbell River Art Gallery (June 2–July 12, 2017), as well as the material and performative practices of Emily Hill, Feminist Land Art Retreat and Vapours, is the work of Cuban American artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985).

Through the 1970s and early 1980s Mendieta made ritual enactments and ephemeral art works in which she used her weight as a force to imprint land and waterscapes, her flesh as a brush to mark domestic and public surfaces, and her limbs as implements to shape liquid and solid matter. With her attention turned to painting in the early 70s, she filmed and photographed gestures in which she used her body as a canvas and a tool for trickling, dripping, scrawling and smearing animal blood and crimson pigments. In *Body Tracks* (1974) she drags the anterior part of her body, soaked in blood, down a white wall, creating elongated traces of her silhouette. For *Blood Inside Outside* (1975) she stands nude at the edge of a river and uses her palm as a brush to paint the circumference of her body with blood. Mendieta shifts her posture to offer the viewer an extended look at how the internal fluid obfuscates the external contours of her figure.

In the body of work that comprises *Looks*, the fibres of Emily Hill's wool rugs are soaked with inks and dyes that have been combed through their weave. Hill primarily practices on the ground, using her hands and feet to work expressively and responsively with substantial amounts of liquid pigments that run in streams and gather in pools on her studio floor. After the application and saturation of dyes, the rugs undergo repeated rinsing, wringing and drying that unpredictably determine how the colours will blend and set. There are no documents of her process, nor identifiable signs of corporeality or figuration in the rugs that would illustrate her embodied practice—and yet the scale of the dyed rug paintings, the span and breadth of the marks on them, and the weight and mass of the woven wool offer clues to the physicality and intimacy of Hill's work.

After experimenting with dyeing and painting various fabrics since 2006, Hill began working with Flokati rugs in 2012 in her studio at Exercise. Exercise was a shared studio and exhibition space on Main Street in Vancouver that Vanessa Disler and Nicole Ondre established and operated from 2011–2013. Working alongside Hill, it was also at Exercise that Disler and Ondre's conceptual poster series developed into the interdisciplinary practice of Feminist Land Art Retreat (FLAR).

Following painting gestures like *Body Tracks* and *Blood Inside Outside*, Mendieta expanded her exploration of her silhouette by working with earth, plants, water and fire to create ephemeral ritual sculptures known as *Siluetas*, that endure through films and photographs. In *Volcano (Arena y Explosión)* (1978) an elevated camera frames a silhouette mound that has been formed from sand. Orange flames ignited from gunpowder burn at the centre of a black volcano over the figure's heart. In *Volcán* (1979) a bed of white gunpowder in the shape of a silhouette is embedded in a mound of dirt. After the powder is consumed in flames and smoke, a black ash figure remains as a scar.

In Feminist Land Art Retreat's video *Heavy Flow* (2015) vermilion lava spews and oozes from erupting volcanos. In some images it is viscous and clotted, and in others dilute and projectile. The video is composed of found footage from news broadcasts, scientific reportage and pedestrian recordings that present voyeuristic and analytic observations of the awe-inspiring phenomenon that often occurs beyond human sight. FLAR's incongruent narration relays professional tips on how to take a successful head-shot photograph. In contrast to the volcano's unconscious volatility, the voice-over expresses an obsessive compulsivity with the performance of being that washes over Hill's dyed rug paintings like a self-help meditation on coping with looking and being looked at.

Alongside the emergence of FLAR and Hill's material practice, the band *Vapours* evolved from a series of collaborative writing and performance projects between Disler, Hill, Ondre and Tiziana La Melia at Exercise. In 2012 they produced a small edition of handmade publications edited by La Melia, titled *Page of Vapours*, parallel to her exhibition *Neck of thirsty flower*. And in 2013, Disler and La Melia performed *Case Studies*, an incantation of musical, spoken, recorded and material elements, for the exhibition *Crystal Tongue*. The structure of Vapours'

performance for *Looks* will expand from the collage form of *Page of Vapours* and the polyphonic rhythm of *Case Studies*. The band will also continue La Melia's meditation on the history of "vapours", which was both a Victorian pathology for a spectrum of women's psychological, cognitive and hormonal symptoms, as well as their prescribed cure through the inhalation of gaseous drugs.

Mendieta cultivated a reverberating meditation on the complex entanglement of spirituality, sexuality, corporeality, mortality and politics. She performed her own birth, death, violation and renewal numerous times, but abstained from articulating the distinction between them, or a hierarchy of their moral or spiritual value. She frequently enacted her rituals in creeks, rivers and oceans, to work with water's mercurial, exorcising qualities. In *Creek* (1974) she lies face down, naked and still, in a pool at the base of a cascade. Her hands and feet are anchored to stones which keep her from being disturbed by the water. In *Ocean Bird (Washup)* (1974), she floats, covered in white bird feathers, in the ocean's gentle surf. The lapping waves roll her body like driftwood into the branches of a buoyant tree and up onto the shore.

For their inaugural presentation, *Vapours* will perform on the shoreline of Johnstone Strait at Big Rock, a geologic anomaly and populist land art monument that attracts tourists and locals who register their presence in graffiti on its surface. Hill and Ondre will perform at the rock with guest artist Sharona Franklin, who designed the image for this poster and the installation in the Satellite Cases at the Campbell River Art Gallery (CRAG). Digital recordings of Disler and La Melia will be conjured throughout the set. Opening the *Looks* exhibition at the water's edge will ground Hill and FLAR's practices in the landscape surrounding the CRAG, the channel of water that separates the gallery from their home in Vancouver, and the shared element of blood, paint, ink and dye. As a gesture that synchronizes the rhythms of these artists' practices with artists such as Mendieta who have revered and refused the vulnerability and violation of women and nature, Hill's ponytail will be cut and used as a brush to scribe a meditation on Big Rock.

VAPOURS

—Amy Kazymerchyk

VAPOURS AT BIG ROCK ~ 5PM ~ JUNE 2 2017  
EMILY HILL: LOOKS ~ FEAT. FEMINIST LAND ART RETREAT  
CAMPBELL RIVER ART GALLERY ~ JUNE 2—JULY 12 2017