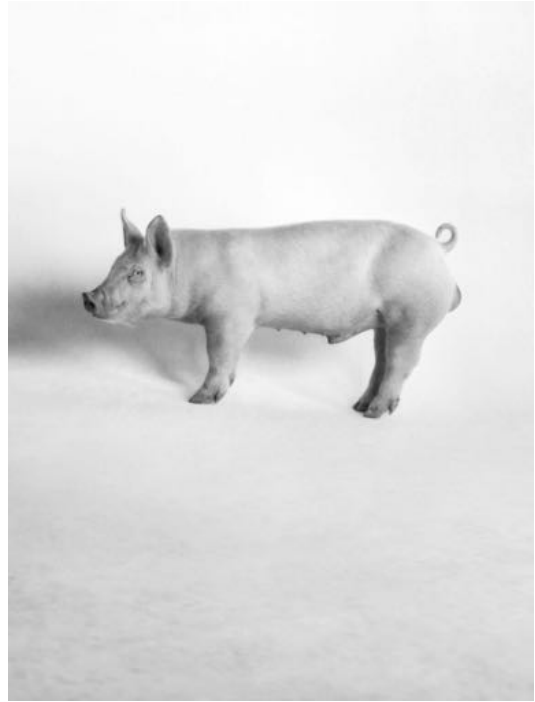


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Heji Shin

THE BIG NUDES

July 21-October 7, 2023
52 Walker Street, New York



Heji Shin, *Eat Me*, 2023. © Heji Shin.
Courtesy the artist and 52 Walker, New York

52 Walker is pleased to announce its eighth exhibition, *THE BIG NUDES*, which will feature the work of New York-based artist Heji Shin (b. 1976). Throughout her photographic practice, Shin has skirted the boundaries of convention, creating images that challenge judgments of taste vis-à-vis fashion, celebrity, and sexuality. This will be her first solo exhibition in New York since 2020.

Shin's practice oscillates fluidly between the commercial and fine-art realms, and the work she exhibits in gallery and museum contexts is strongly influenced by the editorial work she produces. Shin often shoots her varied subjects at close range and employs the vernacular of fashion photography, in which lighting and display are paramount in drawing attention to covetable merchandise. Revealing our scopophilic tendencies while refusing to essentialize or pass moral judgment on her subjects, Shin's eye mines the prohibited and the liminal to deconstruct notions of propriety. Her photographs intimately peer into the unseen spaces between photographer and subject, self and other, as well as public and private.

THE BIG NUDES comprises two discrete bodies of work—each in turn informing the other—as the artist has done elsewhere, for example,

in her 2018-2019 Kunsthalle Zürich solo exhibition, which featured a series of X-rays of Shin holding lapdogs in tandem with monumentally scaled portraits of Kanye West. These seemingly disparate images express the artist's interest in examining how emerging technologies represent sentient bodies and how the genre of portraiture purports to reveal alternative versions of the self. Here, Shin exhibits photographs that picture scans of her own brain, captured with the MRI examination technique known as diffusion tensor imaging (DTI). Primarily for scientific and medical purposes, DTI produces brilliantly colored surveys of the nerve cells and neuronal network of the brain, the body's intellectual core, their morphological forms and iridescent hues expressing the multitudinous resonances of the organ at work. The illustration of Shin's cerebral matter is both recognizable and abstract, stripping away the visage and revealing traces of what is not visible in the representation of a physical likeness. Concentrating the cerebral nucleus of the exhibition in the center of the gallery space, Shin projects her own brain as a Pepper's ghost—a floating 3D holographic image. The illuminated, iridescent brain brightly pulses in a standalone glass structure, creating an impression of the self that troubles and transforms our foundational ideas of what constitutes a portrait.

The namesake of this presentation is Helmut Newton's career-making body of work known as *Big Nudes*—images of models in states of undress, originally appearing as a publication in 1981, and exhibited as life-sized prints at Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, in autumn of that year. Shin's photographic practice mimics Newton's, straddling the line between the art world and the fashion industry and foregrounding the forbidden thrill of indulging the viewer's gaze through one's own distinct visual language. In the exhibition, she recasts Newton's erotic subjects as fleshy pink pigs who assume the poses of female fashion models. Richly rendered in both color and black and white, the nudes lay sideways and pop their hips seductively in large photographs—their epidermal layers and hair appearing uncannily humanoid. Juxtaposed with Shin's brain scans, the pig portraits shift paradigms of the "physical," casting doubt on how we perceive so-called reality on different levels.

Heji Shin: THE BIG NUDES is curated by Ebony L. Haynes and presented by 52 Walker. Special thanks to Dr. Aaron G. Filler, MD, PhD, FRCS, JD, at the Neurography Institute, Santa Monica, California.

Born in Seoul, **Heji Shin** (b. 1976) lives and works in New York. She has had solo exhibitions at institutions such as at KAT_A, Bad Honnef, Germany (2022); Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2021); and Kunsthalle Zürich (2018). Shin has had several solo presentations at galleries worldwide, most recently at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York (2018 and 2020); Galerie Buchholz, Berlin (2019); Gaga & Reena Spaulings, Los Angeles (2019); Galerie Bernhard, Zurich (2016); Real Fine Arts, New York (2013 and 2016); and Anna-Catharina Gebbers, Berlin (2010).

Shin's work has been featured in significant group exhibitions including *To Begin Again: Artists and Childhood*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2022); *New Flesh*, Forde - Espace d'art contemporain, Geneva (2021); *It's Just a Phase*, Kjøpmannsgata Ung Kunst, Trondheim, Norway (2021); *No Dandy, No Fun*, Kunsthalle Bern (2020); *Image Power*, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, the Netherlands (2020); *Time Is Thirsty*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2019); and *@MINED_OUD*, Museo Madre, Naples (2017), among others.

Work by the artist has been included in recurring international presentations such as Tallinn Photomonth, Estonia (2019), the Whitney Biennial, New York (2019), and the Athens Biennale (2018). In 2021, Shin was awarded the KAT_A Award.

Shin's photography has appeared in publications such as *Texte zur Kunst*, *Frieze*, *Garage Magazine*, *032c*, and *Vogue*, as well as in periodicals like *The New York Times*. She has also shot fashion editorials and advertising campaigns for brands such as Gentle Monster, Givenchy, and Tom Ford, among others.

The artist is represented by Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, and Reena Spaulings, New York. She is also represented worldwide by Concrete Rep., an agency focusing on the fashion, editorial, and advertising sectors.

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