

Mal Maison

Maccarone NY
98 Morton Street
June 7 – August 12, 2016

Keltie Ferris, Harmony Hammond, Rosy Keyser, Becky Kolsrud, Simone Leigh,
Alice Mackler, Brie Ruais, Tschabalala Self, Shinique Smith

God, I don't/know what she/sells but she's/me and I know/all about her
— Eileen Myles, "Mal Maison"

Mal Maison features nine artists, born between 1931 and 1990, whose works grapple with the portrayal of the female form by complicating, interceding in, and meddling with representations of the body. Working in painting and sculpture, the artists on view are employing various forms of abstraction as tools with which to claim subjectivity, trouble standards of desirability, and introduce queer and postcolonial dialogues. They are avoiding (if not outright refusing) the image as a means to negate the paradigm of woman-as-image.

These artists have created a multiplicity of abstraction-oriented strategies with which to deal with the body on their own terms, in their own languages. The works, in all their multiformity, demonstrate that the female body does not house an essential shared experience nor can any body and its specific experiences be reduced to a single representation or icon. As some dominant ideologies have positioned the female body as a "bad house," an object of scrutiny, and a site of control, the slipperiness intrinsic to abstraction becomes a useful tool by refusing transparent visibility in favor of a kind of camouflage.

Becky Kolsrud and Alice Mackler disrupt glossy conventions of beauty: Kolsrud's paintings of women behind grates question the iconography of female bodies for sale while Mackler's ceramics deface the magazine images they are based on. Harmony Hammond, Brie Ruais, and Rosy Keyser emphasize the physicality of the body and the specificity of its subjecthood: Hammond's grommets are oozing orifices, wounds, and scars; Ruais uses her own body weight in clay to rake, tear, and spread out a terrain that asserts the female body's occupation of public space; Keyser blurs the distinctions between anatomy and the inanimate. Tschabalala Self and Shinique Smith interrogate the iconographic potentiality of the body: Self probes the symbology and collective fantasies of the black female body and Smith positions worn items of clothing as traces of the bodies that wore them and vessels for their narratives and histories. Keltie Ferris and Simone Leigh address the marginal body: Ferris's imprinted self-portraits feign simulacra while in actuality they present a self-stylized form, one as contrived as the abstract patterns painted on top; and Leigh proposes an uncatalogable body that exists outside of a reified colonial binary.

This exhibition is organized by Ashton Cooper.