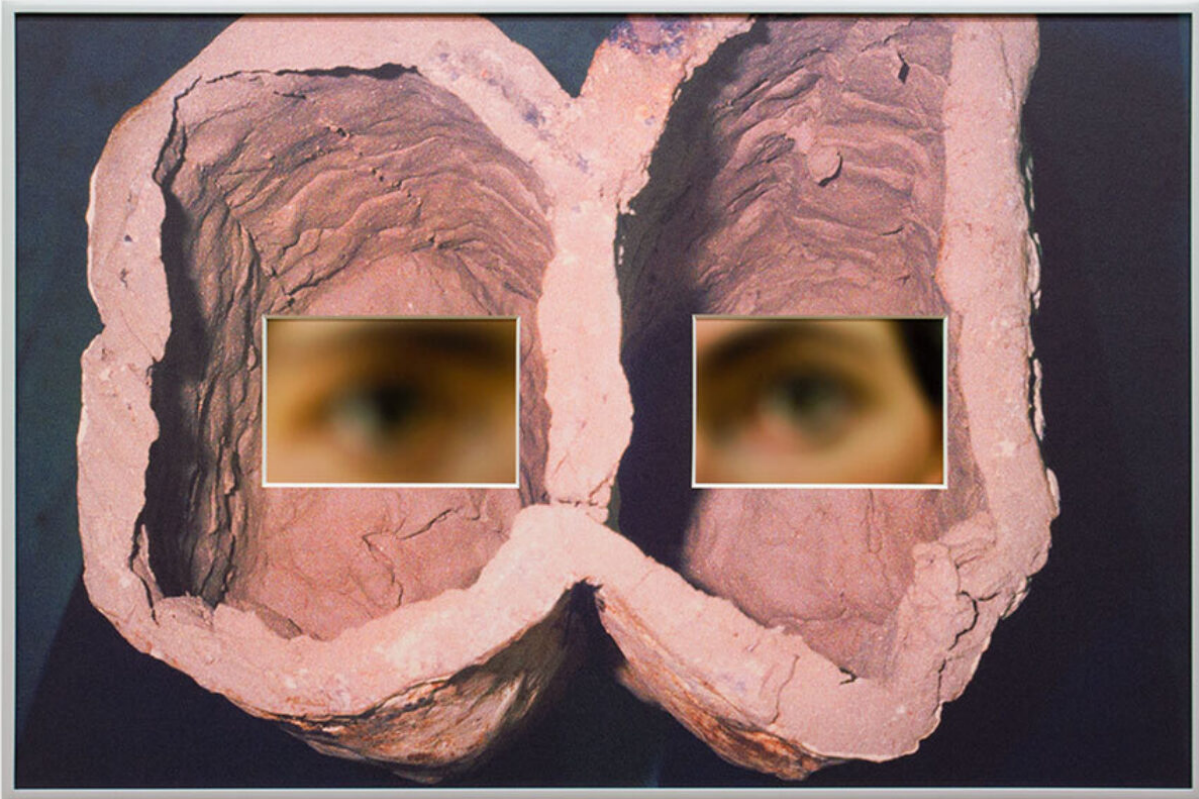


BOMB

Any Room Can Be a Camera: B. Ingrid Olson Interviewed by Jared Quinton

Site-responsive exhibitions of photography and sculpture.



B. Ingrid Olson, *Split Socket Velvet Hollow*, 2015–16, inkjet prints and UV printed matboard in powder-coated aluminum frame, 18.5 x 28 x 1.25 inches. Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík.

Through the use of ambiguous mirrors, exaggerated cropping devices, and treating the frames and photo mats as extensions of the image into material and space, B. Ingrid Olson's photographs stage an intriguing play between her body and the camera. Her sculptural work, by comparison, takes the form of minimalistic bodily proxies—often indexed to her own form—that direct and interrupt viewers' engagement with gallery architecture. In two concurrent exhibitions on view at

Harvard University's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Olson has produced miniature retrospectives of her photo- and object-based works in tandem with a series of sculptures and interventions that respond to the singular architecture of the building, Le Corbusier's only structure in North America.

—Jared Quinton

Jared Quinton

Your work plays with structure in a way that feels both historically grounded and singular. Some works border on a minimalist, brutalist sensibility, while others are bodily, vulnerable, and abject. Yet there's a consistent use of framing—as both a generative and potentially violent act—that seems to order your experimentations. How do you conceptualize the role of structure within or in relationship to your practice?

B. Ingrid Olson

It took me a while to understand that structural approaches are not just formal responses. Instead, these frames, or framing devices, inform or regulate an encounter, influencing how something is understood. A frame is a context or a perspective. When I read, I often flip to the index before I start a book just to see the way the content has been categorized. There is such a personal and faulty quality to indexes even though they seem like the sort of thing that should be clinically objective. I think that is maybe the point of contact in my work as well: admitting the subjectivity or messiness within structuring devices.

Another instance of this in my practice comes in my experience of interior architecture, whether in the studio or in galleries that I make shows in. The intent or design of space itself and my sometimes misaligned proprioceptive experience of that room or building inform a good amount of my work. Architecture is essentially a set of structures that organize space, but organizational systems change as needs evolve. I think a lot about the gaps between something's initial design and how it winds up being used as well as the eventual adaptations meant to bridge the gap.



Installation view of *B. Ingrid Olson: History Mother, Little Sister*, 2022. Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. Photo by Julia Featheringill. Courtesy of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts.

JQ

I'm glad you brought up architecture. What is it about its relationship to photography that interests you? There's something like a cyclical or dialectical engagement in your work between architectural space, the body, and the photographic image, and I'd love to know how you consider the role of the camera in making site-specific work, such as your exhibitions at the Carpenter Center.

BIO

Any room or enclosure can be a camera. Rooms, boxes, and cameras are all potential spaces or containers for images. The Carpenter Center gallery where my exhibition *Little Sister* is located is a very sculptural room. The floor and columns are made of dark cast concrete, but the majority of the room's walls are actually windows made of floor-to-ceiling glass. It feels like a dysfunctional, open camera

with too much light and too much information to form an image. It's a large room without divisions, so all of the architectural details are available to see at once. In response to the exposed nature of the space, I have made a freestanding, architecturally scaled enclosure to support two of my photographic works. This structure, *Door Picture, a view in perspective arranged close together* (2022), extends and limits how the photographic works are situated in the space. It simultaneously acts as a wall on which to hang the works while counteracting a functional display, with large partitioned panels set in front of the images largely obscuring the full-frontal viewing experience. In exhibitions, I always consider the viewer's encounter with my work, attenuating when and how much of the image is revealed, but this exhibition features the most exaggerated intervention I've made. This work incorporates architecture while also refiguring the space. The sight lines around the room are readjusted, and maybe, like a narrowed aperture, they suggest a sharper focus.

JQ

How do you consider the balance between viewers' access to the logic of your work and, perhaps, a desire to keep some of it back just for you?

BIO

Maybe in contradiction to my desire to guide or direct encounters with my work, I don't want to control the interpretation. The work isn't didactic. I always look forward to the conversations with friends, or even strangers, when they tell me what something reminds them of or how it makes them feel. The logic and systems in the work are very interior and built cumulatively from work to work; so in that way you could say I keep logic to myself, but I think that this is not unique to me or my work. The way someone might understand my work may not run parallel to my own understanding of it. In that way, the misinterpretation or misalignment between intent and understanding is inevitably additive and productive.



B. Ingrid Olson, *Untied knots, strings, she, multiple*, 2016–18, inkjet print and UV printed matboard in powder-coated aluminum frame, 25 x 17 x 1.25 inches. Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík.

JQ

I love the idea of misinterpretation as something that produces new knowledge. It has a certain honesty about what art can meaningfully do and introduces an aspect of delayed or continuous temporality—a way that presentations of and experiences of a work accumulate over time and feed back into and change the work itself. I know this is not specific to your practice, but it seems to have relevance here since your exhibition features miniature “retrospectives” of previous photographs and sculptures. Can you talk about the decision to include these components?

BIO

Most of the works in both of my exhibitions at the Carpenter Center are an exaggerated assemblage of different times, cut apart and put next to one another. The decision to think about past work, whether remade as a new iteration or re-presented preexisting work, stems largely from my decision to make two entirely separate but simultaneous exhibitions. The Carpenter Center has two gallery spaces, physically separated by two floors. These spaces have entirely different structures, rules, capabilities, and tenors to them. The upstairs exhibition space has a separate standalone, fully enclosed gallery built inside its original perimeter of wall-to-wall windows. This enveloping, transparent view of the interior gallery offers a distanced vantage point but also a delay that suggests a kind of retrospective energy. There is a highly conscious or even ceremonious way of entering the interior gallery. It reminds me of old European churches where the original, tiny church is preserved, but eventually a larger church is built around it to accommodate larger congregations. However, in the case of the Carpenter Center, the interior gallery came later, added in the year 2000, as a sort of amendment to the space, since there were formerly no permanent walls as a feature of Corbusier’s building. Riffing off these perceptions, my exhibition upstairs, *History Mother*, focuses on a continuous yet conflated sense of time.

The interior gallery of *History Mother* includes photographic works from my *Dura* series (2013–), spanning nearly a decade. I selected works that feel mediated, far away, or at least less proximate, whether it be through collage, drawing, or in moments when the body cedes to abstraction and becomes less recognizable. Time and delay is the guiding principle for this series of works in their often double-dating, which indicates the two different years in which the two photographs were taken. In addition to the photographic works, I have made a

large installation that functions as a sort of index of all of my sculptural reliefs to date but remade in laminated and carved MDF. Though it records the work from a set time frame, 2016 to 2022, it will function outside of time since each of the thirty components have no set order or parameters for spacing between them. It will continue to exist variously, changing into new permutations as it is installed in the future.



Installation view of *B. Ingrid Olson: History Mother, Little Sister*, 2022. Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. *Proto Coda, Index*, 2016–22, MDF, polyacrylic, plywood, glue, vinyl, eggshell, aluminum, latex paint. 30 parts. Photo by Julia Featheringill. Courtesy of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts.

JQ

One of my favorite moments in the show is *White Wall, painted for Gray* (2022), which is a wall Le Corbusier intended to be red that you've repainted in muted grays in—punning?—homage to Eileen Gray whose iconic villa E-1027 Le Corbusier once defaced with colorful murals. Could we end by talking a bit about your engagement with Corbusier? How would you respond to a description of your approach here as “feminist”?

BIO

I do think a lot about gender and power dynamics, so, frequently, my approach is broadly labeled as feminist. While it's not untrue, it's an easy categorization that lacks nuance. In *Little Sister*, akin to Gray's interior design practice, I have not altered the given architecture of the gallery where it is installed. Instead, I used wall paint, light fixtures, and temporary structures to affect the experience and flow of the space. I wanted to draw out otherwise hidden fixity and the absolutism of the architecture, adjusting the focus to allow for alternate perspectives and protagonists in Corbusier's otherwise masculinist space. It is a sheer overlay of new thought: a finessing rather than a demolition. You can't take down the walls around you without the roof caving in on your head.

B. Ingrid Olson: *History Moth* , *Little Sister is on view at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, until December 23.*

Jared Quinton is a writer and curator based in New England.

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