

This Basic Asymmetry
February 5 - April 17, 2022

Through internal sensation, emotion, and cognition we develop a fluid but strong sense of self that allows us to perceive the complexities and nuances of our personal experience. By contrast, it is only through external sensation, especially vision and observation, that we find the ability to develop an understanding of others, splitting our experience of self from others into an asymmetrical paradigm. Having studied this phenomenon in depth Emily Pronin, Associate Professor of Psychology and Public Affairs at Princeton University proposes, “this basic asymmetry has broad consequences,” potentially leading to misunderstanding and disconnection. Pronin suggests that we tend to perceive ourselves via ‘introspection’ and others via ‘extrospection,’ judging others based on what we see, but ourselves based on what we think and feel.

This Basic Asymmetry presents the work of five artists whose practices make available their personal processes of introspection, creating a space for the viewer to reflect on their own relationship to their bodies and how that informs one’s perception of others. Addressing the dissonance in our reckoning between self and other, the works exhibited here accommodate space for mutual exploration. Through vulnerability, observation, recognition, and recollection the artwork in *This Basic Asymmetry* explores new opportunities for perceptions that are inclusive of both self and other. As Pronin states: “understanding the psychological basis of those differences may help mitigate some of their negative effects.”*

Originally trained in fashion design, **Patricia Ayres** (b. 1975, New York, NY) considers themes of the body, creating visceral sculptures that are larger than life. Pulling, stretching, wrapping, and stitching elastic that has been stained and colored with iodine, anointing oil, and other viscous materials, Ayres questions the oppressive bodily subjugation by two societal forces that loom large throughout her practice: the US penal system and the Catholic Church. Lumpy and bulbous mounds protrude from her totemic sculptures, elastic stands in for contorted and constrained skin, calling to mind the palpable psychological effect of the oppressed human body. By use of the corresponding numbers of letters in the English alphabet, Ayres titles her works after the names of saints, simultaneously alluding to identification numbers assigned to inmates.

Gabriela Ruiz (b. 1991, San Fernando Valley, CA) similarly takes on the regulation of the human body in her immersive installation featuring the works *From Above* and *El Camino Solo* (2021), calling into question the discord between how one sees themselves versus how they are seen. A life-size cast of the artist’s body extends from a wall, watching the viewer, emphasizing their external presence through the use of surveillance technology. Color, sound, light, and a sandbox filled with vibrant blue sand commingle in this sensual space where temporal and spatial planes seem to shift between past, present, and future.

Overlaps of time and space are also featured in the work of **Miguel Angel Payano Jr.** (b. 1980, New York, NY) who takes on ‘triple consciousness’ informed by his own multiple cultural identities. An Afro-Caribbean American artist, working between Beijing and New York, Payano creates what he calls ‘heavy collages,’ combining painting and sculpture to investigate identity formation, transnationalism, race, and class. Payano uses humor to weave a constellation of often surreal signs and symbols that playfully address habitual code-switching allowing for navigation through a multiplicity of identifications.

Disjoining the gaze of the viewer **Paul Mpagi Sepuya** (b. 1982, San Bernardino, CA) deconstructs traditional portraiture through obscuration, fragmentation, and reflection of the photographic subject. Featuring the presence of the artist,

occasionally accompanied by a friend, Sepuya's photographs situate queerness and Blackness as starting points for the medium of photography itself. Partially concealing his own image within the frame the artist invites viewers to consider the construction of subjectivity, both in photography and in ourselves. Constructing each image entirely in-camera, Sepuya carefully chooses what to reveal, at all times leaving traces of his own human touch.

Simone Forti (b. 1935, Florence, Italy), pioneering artist, dancer, choreographer, and writer - an icon of experimental dance and Minimalism - innovated forms of improvisational movement that synthesize an awareness of the body with expansive freedom of pure expression. After studying and performing with Anna Halprin Forti studied composition at the Merce Cunningham Studio and began working alongside Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer among others. Forti's piece *Flag in the Water* (2015), seen here, depicts the artist immersing two flags - one with stars and one with stripes - into a fast-flowing river. This intuitive association between the body, nature, and a key symbol of American identity proffers an, at times tender, reading of humanity's propensity to reveal inner thoughts through physical storytelling.

*Pronin, E. (2008). How we see ourselves and how we see others. *Science*, 320, 1177-1180.

Curated by Alexandra Terry, Chief Curator, MCASB. Exhibition text by Alexandra Terry.