

b o d y

doubles

Body Doubles: Holly Murkerson & Sarah Reynolds
Apparatus Projects
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Body Doubles

Gareth Kaye

In film, the body double is an actor whose face is rarely seen and stands in to perform scenes where stunt work, nudity, or in other scenarios that the main actor(s) may not desire to participate or be qualified to perform. In any case, this occupation is situated upon a shift in appearances where one body or form is framed to appear as another from one image to the next. Such a shift extends and inscribes the performance of a specific subject (the lead actor) across two surfaces: the screen, and the figure of their double. However, the act of inscription is not entirely one sided, rather than a subsuming extension of a given “I” (the lead actor), the projection of a character onto the screen results from a communion of two distinct figures coalescing into a singular body and act; cohabiting a specific sphere of gesture and being. The body double is simultaneously a cohabitation of a unified body, but also marks its schism. This tenuous coexistence is only made possible from the use of selective framing mechanisms where either through wide and zoomed out shots or selective close-ups. Each is a sleight of hand, which decenters the perceptive and perspectival capacities of the audience, who, finding themselves unable to discern the difference between figures leads to a kind of stereoscopy, where two separate figures merge into one across the surface. In this case, a double is not meant to expand or diffuse a presence across a stretch of time or space, but to reinforce and condense a specific presence into a more wholly fortified entity, whose expected gestural capacities (which make the character “real”) are possible only through the difference of the bodies that make them up.

The work of Chicago based artists Holly Murkerson and Sarah Reynolds each represents this phenomena of placing the body at the center of the audience’s visual field, only to collapse the figure’s boundaries and propose a new framework by which to engage corporeality and its representation. As in cinema, where the reproducibility of both the media, and look of a specific actor/body can create single distinct character. Both Murkerson and Reynolds’s respective practices utilize techniques and materials that engage the possibilities of reproduction for creating singular and discreet forms. While each artist works directly from their own bodies, the succession of fragmented limbs and appendages do not

necessarily proliferate the image of a specific body, but rather proffer the contemplation and consideration of a broader figure: a kind of generalized or expanded corpus whose inhabitation is formed and enacted upon by a collective network of bodies. In this capacity, we are all body doubles, acting together from myriad distances, angles, and close-ups, collectively developing a broader character through gestures, and their reproduction. Through two bodies of work that emphasize the generative abilities of the body and modes of being through iterative and reproducible forms: Murkerson's photographs and Reynolds's sculptures look to offer a way in which our own figuration is constituted, shared, split, unified, acted upon and re-enacted in turn.

Close-Up: Diplopia and infinite approach

One of the common techniques employed to disguise a body double is the close-up. Frequently, this is used when nudity or a focused shot of a certain area of the body is required. Extreme close-up, (frequently foregoing any region near the face) serves to merge the differing bodies into the homogenized form of the character. While normally the expectation is that closer inspection will yield difference, in this case it does the opposite. Rather than the close-up of a character revealing their corporeal duality, it concretizes it more through a series of frames, both fulfilling visual, cultural and biological expectations which fill the gaps that would otherwise delineate and split differing bodies.

Diplopia (double vision), however, is an occurrence that performs the opposite. Whereas two divergent actors are merged into a coherent and singular one by the camera's lens, diplopia results in the splitting of a unified object into a double of itself if it approaches too closely to the eyes, or if a neurological condition exists that splits objects at specific angles or distances. In the case of diplopia, proximity begets a tenuous difference, as opposed to the contingent unity before the camera's lens. The temporary dislodgment of a singular object or body from its otherwise materially coherent boundaries is a perceptual glitch, precipitated by and correctable

through an adjustment in perspective. Correcting the distance between the gaze and its object ought to result in the reestablishment of a singular object, whereas in cinema there is no adjustment one can make to discern the difference between double and actor during a close-up. The cinematic frame lends the audience a fixed perspective and gaze, dominating the optical field with diplopia's reciprocal, a monocular authority that collapses the otherwise fixed boundaries of corporeality into the singular body of the character, whose form is reined in by the prophylaxis of the screen, beyond which they cease to exist, bifurcating back into actor and double, marking the return to corporeal difference.

The work of Sarah Reynolds operates in an area situated between these two visual experiences. Through her practice, Reynolds locates the body as a site for transformation, reconstruction, and reimagining by means of its casting, reproduction, and mapping. Using her own body as the wellspring the work, Reynolds does not look to create a one-to-one relationship between her own body and those she is casting, but rather aims to push the object (and by extension her own body) beyond corporeality into a state of indeterminacy. While her practice employs many of the tenants of minimalist rhetoric – serial repetition, reproducibility, an emphasis on the material qualities of the object, and an emphasis on form – it eschews the calculated distance and predictability that often accompanies this logic. Reynolds casts sculptures and molds from nipples, breasts, joints, feet and the fluid space that exists between these parts. Each interrogates and expands the logic of the close-up; concurrently confusing its function while still realizing its duplicitous penchant to both blend and differentiate.

Reynolds thrives in the tension cultivated by the close-up, forming sculptures that invite inspection and tease at closure. The fixity and familiarity of the body haunt the work in its absence. Each form she casts appears just corporeal enough to breach the field of recognition before being swept back beneath a tide of uncertainty. The contradictory surface tension recalls how critic Timothy Morton has framed the dilemma of appearance as: “The past just is appearance” and the present is “an

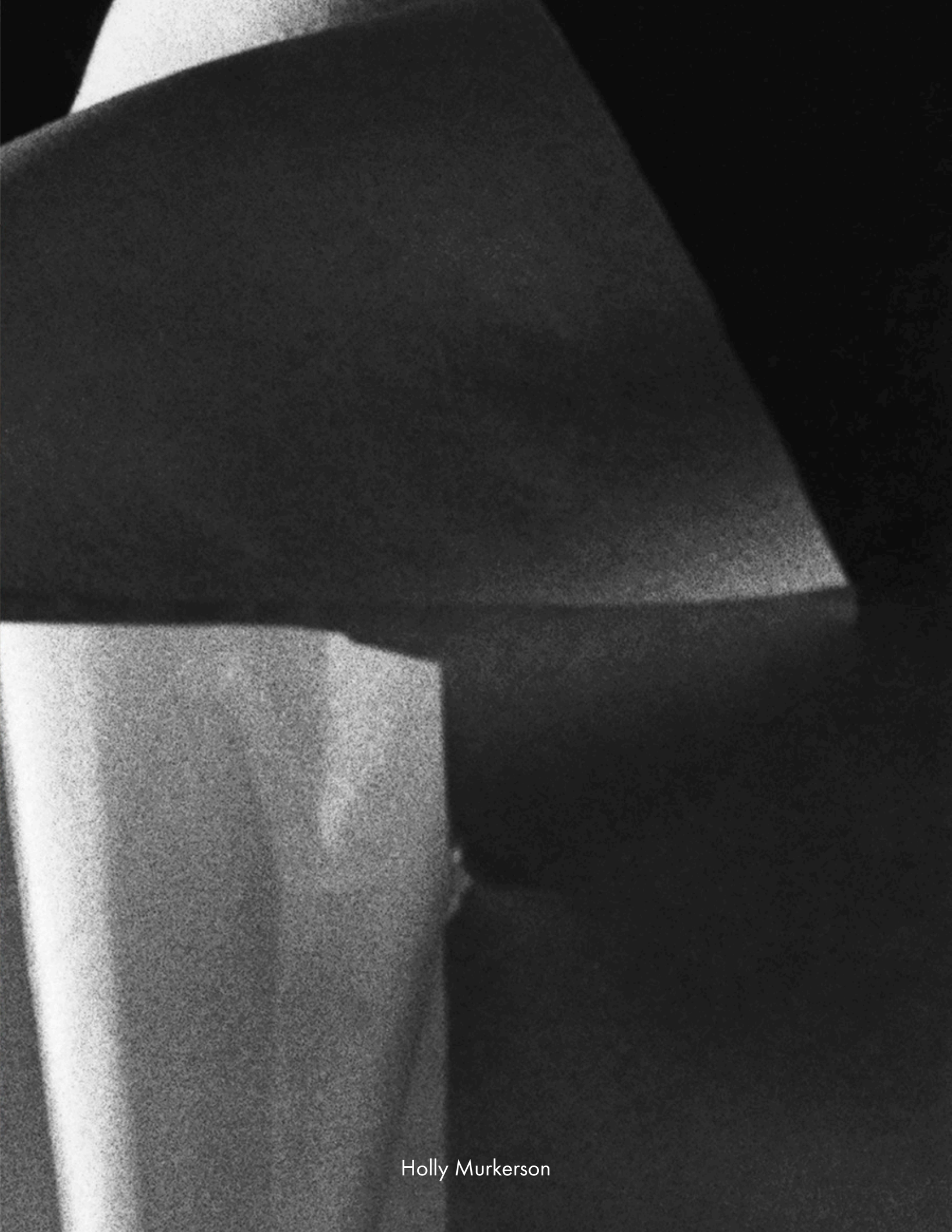
uncanny intermeshing of appearance and essence” These forms prove so elusive because they have been (appearance) yet will be and are something else that is dissociative of one’s own corporeality. Much like Heidegger’s hammer, this body is fractured and disbursed into pieces so that we may recognize it as thus. Yet, once we recognize it, it withdraws, becoming something else precisely because it cannot yield itself wholly as body nor image, but as something that exists as a surface in constant translation. Reynolds’s bodies are materially impenetrable, yet metaphysically porous.

A close-up exposes form as something that approaches, and is consistently moving towards the spectator, deeper, or shallower I should say, into the field of vision. The parts of her body that she chooses to cast create the spaces and perceptive frames used to illicit the unity and singularity of their image. However, while their material heaviness belies an expectation of stasis, the sculptures move beyond cinematic illusionism where a vantage point creates a trompe l’oeil, homogenizing discreet bodies, rather, at the brink of coherency Reynolds’s sculptures continue their advance into view, splitting off into innumerable doubles of themselves, visually and materially. Plaster casts of feet stack themselves on top of one another, clutched around a steel armature, climbing and descending its length at the same time. Similarly, knees and elbows are prone to shift between an identifiable marker of cogent, corporeal features to stones or organic mounds in a kind of hall-of-mirrors Minimalism. Even beyond the realm of resemblance by formal ambiguity, Reynolds will frequently cast the same work in myriad different materials, pairing them together forming a sequence of works that truly double themselves at the moment of their close-up.

The gestalt of Reynolds’s selective editing dislodges the body from its bearings, composing and decomposing a figure where the “knee-bone” is never connected to the “leg-bone”, etc. Each atomized limb, joint, and appendage is distanced from its origin, withdrawing into its own shape, demonstrating both reference and refusal towards the proximity to the bodies experiencing it. The multiplicity of these objects reduces the specificity of the maker’s body to the point of obliteration, where



Sarah Reynolds



Holly Murkerson

the body, unable to be firmly deduced to a body enters the sphere of the general and can begin to compose a figure more broadly inhabitable, transformative, and expansive all while refusing all attempts at relation, projection, and recognition. These forms sit in a withdrawn suspension, oscillating between stasis and vibration.

Zoom-Out: Beyond Body, Beyond Frame

For the performance of stunt work or complex choreography a double can exist within the field of vision at a distance to obscure their features, or – and in an increasingly common digital trend – the features of the person whom they double can be superimposed over them digitally. One need look no further than the 2010 controversy over the film *Black Swan*. The co-occupation of character held together by Natalie Portman (the lead actress) and Sarah Lane (her dance double), was never meant to become as publicized as it was, rather the convergence of both bodies were meant to result in a unified character (Nina). The highly publicized rupture subsequently splits the character on screen into two, suspended between the fixed, illusory and cinematic realm, where the self-effacement of both actor and double is expected to occur. Instead, what audiences end up with once aware of the schism is a form of split representation. When the camera zooms out, bodily coherency is ruptured, inducing diplopia from a distance, pulling the character in two. In its diffusion, the body becomes more solid, more object-like, stranger – the body is at hand (*vorhanden*) in the Hiedegarian sense of an image being present, yet withdrawn. It is in this space of contradiction, dissemblance, uncertainty and appearance where Holly Murkerson's photographic objects operate most succinctly. During her career Murkerson has engaged the photographic process as an area for exploring the possibilities of body, image and photographic materiality. Through haptic and oftentimes accidental experiments in the darkroom, she pieces together images that transgress alignment and cogency, a figure whose relationship to the ground seems to be tenuous at most, and at times ends up forming the ground itself.

Drawing on her past experience as a dancer, Murkerson's work focuses on the relationships between body, gesture and perception, creating complex composite images in the darkroom to engage and challenge the ways in which the body may be presented photographically. Engaging the limits of photographic containment, Murkerson's images form a diaphanous corporeality, which gently disassembles both the body and photographic apparatus, reframing and (re)presenting each as surfaces ripe for disassembly; probing the ways in which the photograph may best represent movement, space, and subjectivities beyond traditional figurative perspectives.

Appendages, dislocated from any recognizable body overlap into a mass of jumbled port de bras and pliés. These images often condense the figure/ground relationship into a vacuum seal, with certain body parts possessing a degree of transparency that allows them to fade into one another and reveal what lay beneath. In others, Murkerson frames off the images, coating the glass that shields the photo in black enamel; building up a flat interior frame that recedes and melds with the picture plane in a relationship that continues to advance and recede against the condensed mass of limbs at center, however, paint isn't always needed to create the strange vortices of images against a black background. Murkerson, often conforms her body to the dimensions of the enlarger cubicle and paper that she works with, contorting, bending, and pressing against the paper through the exposure process, leaving languid and transparent traces of limbs across the surface. Each arm, leg, hand, etc. opens up the surface of the paper, simultaneously marking and protecting it from exposure. While the figure makes its mark, it often is overtaken afterwards by the colors and images that fill its stead once she has readjusted herself in relation to the paper.

Murkerson's work revels in the confusion between distance and proximity, and between a sense of solidity and diffusion that best occurs when the relationships concerning the body and its position within larger space are no longer easily differentiated. Much like questioning the veracity of the

performing body during *Black Swan*, these images proffer that the figure is always splitting amongst itself and its others, blending, translating and conflating itself with its position in space, exploring the mutability of identification, yet simultaneously asserting presence and corporeality. The picture plane, much like the balletic proscenium, is site of emergence for a body that not only operates within the ground, but sets it as well. The story of in dance is inscribed upon the bodies that execute the choreography, and likewise the ground of the image is inscribed into the translucent limbs and shadows left behind by Murkerson's own body. Each disarticulated form and bend presents itself in its entirety, but is always at arm's length. These are that bodies come to the stage, but gather at the very edge where one can just make out that someone is there. Are they moving forward? Are they moving backward? Each body presents itself on the horizon of legibility, but at each level it splits apart, revealing a multiplicity of readings and possibilities: "In coming to the fore, it goes within. But its "within is not anything other than its "fore": its ontological content is sur-face, ex-position, ex-expression." Murkerson's images is body on stage, containing multitudes within itself, and always at the brink of splitting apart as we look, threatening the frame with the excesses tumbling off, but even when they break, even if they do, it only presents a new window through which the image may retreat, forming yet another body irreducibly hermetic, and irreducibly penetrable. To view these images from a distance reveals the figure as an object able to constitute its own self on its own ground, no longer needing to be translated and drawn out from it.

Difference Despite Repetition

The multiplicity concealed by coherence, or homogeneity is central in each artists' practice: both rest on the surface, on the past, on something having been torn asunder and withdrawing from the surface, but never over the horizon. Corporeality approaches liminality, and expresses an osmosis like affinity for its own kind of negative affirmation. By centering each of their own bodies as the site image to surface, both Reynolds and Murkerson act out the role of their own doubles, and the doubles to each of their images, which in turn reject placement and specificity. A character is born, an object in and of itself. Present and withdrawn, defined by what is absent, singular despite all internal and external multiplicities, teasing that embodiment may be best perceived through the lens its dissolution.

Works in the exhibition

Sarah Reynolds

Come Together

Cast plaster & steel rod

60" L x 52" W x 22" D

Holly Murkerson

Circling, 2018

Silver gelatin, glass and enamel

20 x 16 inches

Holly Murkerson

Ease Belies Exertion, 2017

Silver gelatin

20 x 16 inches

Sarah Reynolds

Two Breasts

Cast latex & steel rod

approx. 42" L x 28" W

Sarah Reynolds

Wax Cast of My Knee: Attempt 4 of 5

Inkjet Print

32" L x 24" W

Holly Murkerson
Body reveal, 2015
Unique c-print
24 x 20 inches

Sarah Reynolds
Emerging Forms
Cast aluminum & plaster
26" L x 14" W x 3.5" D

Sarah Reynolds
Growth
Cast concrete, chia seeds, & glass dish
approx. 10" L x 7" W x 3" D

Sarah Reynolds
Spread
Cast bronze & steel plate
8" L x 24" W x 2.5" D

Holly Murkerson
become still, 2018
Plaster, wax, silver gelatin print
13 x 10.5 x 2 inches

Holly Murkerson (b. 1982, Lakeland, FL) lives in Chicago, Illinois where she received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Murkerson is the recipient of a 2018 DCASE Individual Artist Grant, and has attended residencies at Ox-bow School of Art, the Ragdale Foundation, and Harold Arts. Recent exhibitions include *Adds Donna*; *Roots and Culture*; *So Weit, die Zukunft [SWDZ]*, Vienna, Austria; Rockford University; Columbia College, Chicago; Andrew Rafacz; Columbia University, New York; and *Julius Caesar*. Murkerson is a member of the artist-run gallery and collective, *Adds Donna*.

Sarah H. Reynolds (b. 1987) is a Chicago-based, interdisciplinary artist who received her BA from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study and her MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She uses metal, latex, urethane, plaster, clay, and photography as mediums to cast and document her own body. The process of creating multiple iterations from the same reference results in a body of work that is abstracted, yet mimetic and allows for new meanings and interpretations to unfold. Her work has been exhibited in Chicago, NYC, Brooklyn and Miami, at venues such as *Comfort Station*, *Apparatus Projects*, *Lithium Gallery*, *The Overlook Place*, *University Club of Chicago*, *Elastic Arts*, *LATITUDE*, *Cheim & Read*, *StoreFront at Ten Eyck*, *Judith Charles Gallery*, *Theodore:Art*, *Front Room*, and the *National YoungArts Foundation*.

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Sarah Reynolds and Holly Murkerson

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