



Faculty of Art

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Brutalizing veneers: Pamela Masik's The Forgotten

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Belliveau's health over several photographs, but the artist also captures his mother's emotional highs. The family orbits Mrs. Belliveau throughout the series, attesting to their strength and resilience.

It is obvious that cancer causes suffering in both those with the disease and those who are close to them. For Mr. Belliveau, his wife's cancer has rendered him emotionally and physically weary. In only the few short years of the series, decades of age show in his face. In *Saturday Afternoon* (2003), Mr. Belliveau's bed has become a centre of intrigue. He sleeps with arms crossed on a Super Mario Bros. pillowcase sheltered by a bubbly pink blanket. Several years later, after his wife's death in January of 2005, there is an image of an empty bed with an unsheeted mattress, rumpled blanket and a deeply rust-stained pillow (*Master Bedroom*, 2006). Mr. Belliveau's bed has become a site of abject loss. It appears that without the physical presence of his wife, and following the trauma of her death, Mr. Belliveau's bed has become a metaphor for his emotional and physical desolation.

Considering his father's bed of sleep alongside his mother's bed of confinement, Belliveau offers what is arguably the most poignant photograph in the series with *Telling Jokes* (2004). In it, Mrs. Belliveau is caught in a moment of laughter. She sits up in bed, her oversized green shirt blending into the pale green background of the wall behind. Her hands are held together and a tub of ice cream rests in her lap. In earlier pictures, the representational presence of God is readily available in such works as *After Service* (2003) where Mrs. Belliveau cleans up after a service she has conducted in her role as a minister. Later, as the cancer worsens, the visual prominence of God, as characterized by the crucifix and other symbols, is diminished. The visual focus has shifted from the incarnation of God to simpler pleasures like ice cream. Arguably, the question of the visibility and invisibility of God is what is most fascinating about the series as a whole. Is this a conscious choice by Belliveau, or

mere coincidence? Do the images confront a larger moral and spiritual dilemma?

Combining old family photographs, sculpture, and Belliveau's recent photographic practice, the exhibition teems with all things autobiographical, so much so that it tends to look "busy." Particular displays like the collection of old found family photographs, arranged in no particular chronological order, are perhaps intended to add familial context, but they are seemingly out of place and add ambivalence to the current series. Yet, one cannot help but be torn between the idea that the exhibition calls for a narrower, more selective focus on current work on the one hand, and the idea that the complexity of family life, containing heterogeneous circumstances in which past present and future affect each other, demands this kind of complicated representation. What is essentially at question in this exhibition is that area in between comprehension of the artist's time and space (autobiography) and its representation (exhibition).

1. The Torontoist: "Jaret Belliveau's Family Portraits." http://torontoist.com/2010/02/family_portraits.php (accessed March 26, 2010).

MATTHEW RYAN SMITH is a Toronto-based writer, curator and Ph.D. candidate in Art and Visual Culture at The University of Western Ontario. His current research explores the politics of disclosure in contemporary autobiographical and confessional art.

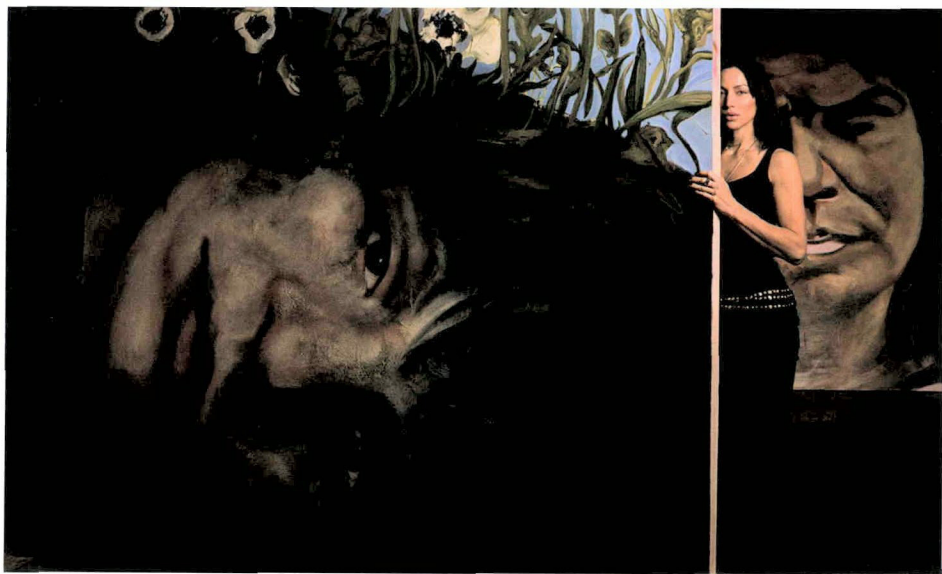
**BRUTALIZING VENEERS:
PAMELA MASIK'S
The Forgotten (Preview)**
Vancouver Public Library Square
• 16 – 26, January 2010
REVIEW BY Francisco-Fernando
Granados

During the month of January, artist Pamela Masik installed a selection from her project *The Forgotten* in the exhibition space at the Central Branch of the Vancouver Public Library. *The Forgotten* consists of a series of large-scale paintings depicting the 69 women who have disappeared from Vancouver's Downtown East Side. Upon entering Library Square, I first found the work as I looked down through the glass railing towards the basement. I walked downstairs to get a closer look.

A suite of five 8'x10' portraits hang against a glass wall. The paintings appear to be based on snapshots of the women that were sourced from their "missing" posters. For each canvas, Masik has taken a different approach, as though to give each work a sense of individuality. The women's names and other words have been scribbled in the oil paint. One of the portraits presents a woman's face partially erased with white paint; another renders the brutalized features in an earth-tone *grisaille*; yet another has been painted over a newspaper collage. Perhaps most disturbing is the canvas that depicts an image of a woman's face slashed vertically all the way through. They are exposed like this, marred and humiliated, in an overwhelmingly spectacular size. The relationship between artist and model that Masik enacts does not merely seem to represent, but indeed reproduce the violence that has been inflicted on her subjects.

This public showing of the work served to publicize "an exclusive preview" for the project that took place in the artist's "new 14,000 sq ft studio" on January 29th. Vancouver's Mayor, Gregor Robertson, who announced at the event that the complete set of portraits is going to be exhibited through the Museum of Anthropology in early 2011, attended the private preview.

The invitation for the January 29th event features a quote from Antony Shelton, Director of the Museum of Anthropology. In it, he proclaims that the artist "returns the humanity to her subjects" through her paintings. Masik's own statement in her website goes on to say that "[t]he intent of



Pamela Masik posing with her *Forgotten* series. Photo: Melissa Gidney, 2010.

the work [...] is to raise awareness of the social problem inherent within our society." The choices of the Library, the Museum of Anthropology, the reference to the private artist's studio and the website (<http://www.theforgotten.ca/>), as contexts for the exhibition of these images, bring up important questions about the ways in which Masik's attempt to exalt and rehumanize her models signify in the expanded social field in which the artist herself wants the work to operate.

What kind of knowledge is created when the brutalization of the disappeared women is so graphically displayed? How can the project restore the dignity of the subjects when the audience is asked to look down on them? How does placing the images of the victims in an anthropological museum serve to humanize them? What are the historical implications of this choice of venue, particularly in light of the fact that many of the disappeared women from the Downtown East Side belong to First Nations communi-

ties? What happens when these images of violence are privatized and turned into an art-world event?

The majority of the pictures on the website for the project feature the artist in front of her creations. In the image found next to her Artist's Statement, Masik's fashionable attire and flawless make-up stands in stark contrast to the blood-red paint that drips from her subject's nose. In another shot from the Press Gallery, the artist's sophisticated pose denotes a socio-economic privilege that disconnects her from the classed and racialized likeness found in the painting behind her. It is perhaps this disconnect that makes the paintings feel so insulting (jarring is too mild a word). There seems to be a lack of connection not only between the artist and the models, but between the artist and the social conditions that frame the painful circumstances she has set out to represent.

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rently working in performance and cultural criticism. Through his practice, he aims to create ephemeral spaces where larger socio-political contexts can collapse and co-exist with personal narratives.

ONLY HOPE WAS LEFT:
INSIDE *Pandora's Box*
 Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery •
 29 January – 21 March, 2010
 CURATED BY Amanda Cachia
 REVIEW BY Erin Silver

The myth of Pandora presents a portrait of woman as a beautiful evil who, consumed by her own curiosity, opens a box and unleashes all of the ills of society onto the world, only to close the lid before Hope can escape. *Pandora's Box*, a touring exhibition curated by Dunlop Art Gallery's Director/