Laurel Nakadate: *Photographs, Videos & Performances*
Atlanta Contemporary Art Center: October 12 – December 16, 2012

Shoulders hunched, face damp, teary-eyed, mouth sprung and taunt, Laurel Nakadate cries and stares into the mirror of a public bathroom stall, at the same moment snapping *February 9, 2010*. This seemingly intimate self portrait is one of the three hundred and sixty five photographs that make up *365 Days of Tears* (2010)—a selection of which is currently on view at the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. For this series Nakadate documented herself crying alone for each day of 2010 in various locations and states of undress. In some works only her shadow is on offer while others are full frontal, spread eagle, headless, or draped languidly over a boulder nested in the landscape. Yet, rather than compelling a narrative of "getting through things"—as the gallery's press release suggests—the images are strung together with a contiguous affective thread that plays on the most prominent stereotypes of human, but more specifically gendered, vulnerability. These constitutive elements for each image in which Nakadate is crying and alone leaves the artist—as well as the viewers—in a stale and alienated emotional cul-de-sac as they traverse three walls filled with identically sized large scale images.

In the scope of the exhibition—that encompasses videos and photographs from 2007 to the present—one sees how Nakadate's work preys on the familiar appeal of confessional culture. Reproducing the emotional novacaine contemporary life is regularly injected with via social media and overinformation, Nakadate shows the difficulty of interpersonal, emotional engagement and recognition between herself and strangers as well as the polarizing power dynamics that result from such encounters.

Exorcism in January(2009) is one such example of the interpersonal disconnect Nakadate has both constructed and exposed in her images. In this short video Nakadate enters the home of a unshaven, balding, overweight middle aged man who appears to be living alone. He looks askance throughout the video as Nakadate flails about the room, her shirt slipping off at the shoulders, writhing on the floor and lightly closing her eyes as she performs an exorcism in the presence of this man who looks at once confused, guilty and flattered by the attention throughout. Sadly, he will come to bear the brunt of her critique as an individual that has been pegged with a litany of unsusbstantiaed lecherous stereotypes as the work does nothing to dispell the gender and age dynamic between these two demographics that American culture has inscribed such figures in.

These caricatures—expressly deriviative of a globalized era that champions the identificatory slippage of people, places and things—continue with the white, middle class, tween girls sourced by open call for the video *Good Morning Sunshine* (2009). Here Nakadate enters the young girls' bedrooms, camcorder in hand, as she wakes them up. From offscreen one can hears Nakadate's variously intoned voice coaxing these young girls awake—"Good morning sunshine. Time to get up." Alternately questioning and instructing them to perform—"Show me your feet. What's under your shirt?". Each passively complies with an affective stance that is somewhere between a coy self awareness and complete malleability, mirroring the lack of agency given to children at this age and the manipulative position on offer for authority figures.

The work alludes to a kind of soft porn that points to the contextual issue and curatorial responsibilty of presenting these images in Atlanta, Georgia—one of fourteen cities in the United States with the highest rates of child sex traffiking: a state where some 1200 men buy sex with young women every month. The concrete reprecussions of these facts—when seen in contrast to Nakadate's constructed realities and pasteurized emotions—express the need for cultural centers like the Contemporary to recognize the cultural context in which they are operating in and to champion practices that challenge, rather than condone.

—Amanda Parmer

**This review was commissioned by Cathy Fox for the online journal ArtsATL in Atlanta, Georgia. After many rounds of edits it became clear that the text was being subjected to a bizarre form of censorsip. The last email, in response to the text above, concluded:*

"I'd like you to say it more clearly. Think Hemingway."