

Petzel

Lauren O'Neill-Butler, "Dana Hoey: Petzel Gallery," *Artforum*, May 2013.

ARTFORUM

Dana Hoey PETZEL GALLERY

The title and content of Dana Hoey's latest series of photographs riffs on classic works of French feminist theory—Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977)—while ushering in a contemporary take on representations of women's rights and "femininity." Named "The Phantom Sex," 2010–13, the series portrays the female form in traces, all phantasmagoric: a "death mask" of actress Sean Young; a concrete cast of the artist's face that resembles an antique statue; and a silicone cast of a friend's torso, white and opaque like a (bizarre) ice sculpture. In sum, the show had an aura of the postapocalyptic, the day *way* after tomorrow. If Hoey's 2008 series "Experiments in Primitive Living" seemed to portray life on earth after some mass destruction, her new works insinuate an even more distant beyond, a post-corporeal era in which only putrefying relics might suggest the "fairer" sex.

Her better-known photographs, made in the 1990s and early 2000s, take a very different tack. Often they depict a moment just before or after an individual—typically a woman, usually young—experiences a particularly emotional event. In *Rebirthing*, 2002, for example, we see five women, each with a different expression on her face, kneeling around another woman who seems to be in a state both euphoric and cataclysmic. (Hoey drew inspiration for this piece from a news story about the smothering death of a ten-year-old girl in one such "rebirthing" ceremony held by the girl's adoptive mother.) Seen amid a tight selection of works in Hoey's recent miniretrospective at Albany's University Art Museum last fall, this and other photographs traded in an emotional multiplicity and oscillation, typically packed with a set of intricately related affective responses for the viewer to parse and sometimes transitively feel. As critic Johanna Burton noted in the accompanying catalogue, "One merely—and extraordinarily—is able to see what usually can only be experienced: emotional ties."

For "The Phantom Sex," Hoey uses artificial human forms to convey these bonds in more complex but equally potent ways, and puts new focus on materiality. A resolve emerges in the unresolved, almost unknowable imagery in these works. *Bodies in Space*, 2011, for instance, depicts the ghostly shells of four people, sculptural silhouettes



Dana Hoey, *Bodies in Space*, 2011, ink jet print, 30 x 45".

made of tape, resting next to one another and on a black gravel ground. These lucent skins may lead us to some sort of narrative interpretation (human molting, alien autopsy?), yet the low-fi production and singularity of the work also point to something else.

Standing before a set of three closely installed pictures—of the aforementioned icy torso (*Mary*, 2010), of an Art Nouveau lamp (*Electric Lady*, 2012), and of the hunching chest of a small, glossy ceramic sculpture (*Dutch Torso*, 2011)—I experienced a desire to identify with these representations. When considered with her earlier pictures, Hoey's new work points to bodies moving through time, to the impact of age. Yet by removing actual human beings and replacing them with echoes and vestiges, she also offers a comment on the ways in which representations of the female form have adapted and transformed after centuries of aesthetic and affective responses—from touching to retouching and beyond.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler