

Mel Keiser, Nicole White, and Chris Wille

Self is a River



The McLean County Arts Center presents ***Self is a River***, an exhibition of self portraiture featuring work by Mel Keiser, Nicole White, and Chris Wille in the Armstrong Gallery, January 9 through February 28 2015. A free and public Reception will be on Friday, January 16 from 5 to 7 pm.

Self is a River features the work of three artists exploring the concept of self as constant and yet perpetually in flux. Co-curated with Bloomington artist Melanie Scott-Dockery, she notes, "In reference to the existence of all things, Heraclitus said you can never step into the same river twice. By using themselves as subject, artists have revealed the changing nature of being." The photography based work of Mel Keiser and Nicole White paired with Chris Wille's new media work demonstrates this desire to capture fleeting moments in an eternal evolution.

Mel Keiser's mixed media series titled *Meltypes* begin with the same self portrait photograph. Each *Meltype* is then physically manipulated in varied ways- cut, abraded, collaged- in an effort to create or discover the essential self. Mel Keiser describes her work as "an investigation inward toward the unknowability of self and the subjectivity of self-identity." Each *Meltype* is finished by being dipped in an encaustic wax and then hung in a clear acrylic shadow box- an act of preservation. A second series titled *Mel-face* consists of palm sized photographs of the same self portrait altered uniquely with a layer of graphite drawing. The symmetrically mirrored photograph becomes adorned and covered by the artist's imperfect but earnest alterations of her face. Keiser states, "In making these works, I am both researcher and subject, analyst and analysand. As such, my nearness to the subject makes me simultaneously the best and worst person to pursue this research."

Three small photographs by Nicole White act as portals to the spirit usually hidden within the self. Each self portrait contains a face gazing out from a fog of different colors- the haze of color is her aura. White explains that in aura photography "two exposures take place simultaneously; one capturing the visage of the sitter while the other presents the individual's energy via a series of flashing colored lights." Photography as true documentation has always been questionable. In art making this play of doubt and belief in photography offers artists and viewers permission to wonder.

Chris Wille uses a variety of new media to make visible the unseen aspects of himself. Through computer programs, video, installation, and body sensors, Wille expands the confines of his bodily experience. Computer code is used in the artwork to distort or degrade visual images exemplifying a difficulty in communicating personal experience. Wille presents an inch thick, hard bound book titled 100-2795. Filled cover to cover with computer code translated from an image of a self portrait, the sequences of letters and numbers are visually indistinguishable unless hand typed into a hex editor. A wall installation of images of Wille's heart rate recorded at various times of the day during different activities is also present- a durational piece that will expand and change with each day of the exhibition. Wille's work considers both the limits and possibilities of communicating himself to another and himself through technology.

Melanie Scott-Dockery, of Bloomington, has her MFA from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb with a Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies. Mel Keiser is an artist based in Chicago, IL. Her work in photographic media is informed by her graduate degree in painting from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and undergraduate degree from Illinois Wesleyan University. Nicole White of Louisville, Kentucky, is a photographer with her MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, an MA in Art History from University of Connecticut, and a BFA from Massachusetts College of Art. Chris Wille is a new media artist of Bloomington with his MFA from Illinois State University and a BA from Eastern Illinois University.

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