



Kiki Seror, *Face of a Virus /gif/feelmyself/08*, 2013, archival digital print on metallic silver paper, 16.5" x 23.5." Courtesy of the artist and CB1 Gallery.

KIKI SEROR: HYSTERESIS

CB1 Gallery – Los Angeles

By Tucker Neel

Pornographic tastes are often some of the most telling things about a person. But porn isn't a media that begs much self-reflection from its audience; the tantalizing pictures are too busy doing their job to worry about *you*. Thankfully, art and psychoanalysis often do this job for and with us. Using the power of both, the artist Kiki Seror's recent exhibition "Hysteresis" takes the digital porn universe as a starting point to turn our gaze and our thoughts inward while at the same time examining larger social phenomena wrapped up in complex online and real-life sexual subjects.

Seror's videos in this exhibition call attention to how we imagine our libidinal selves through the bodies of others. For these works Seror paints parts of her body in a saturated color and then uses real-time digital video software to color-key out parts of her body, replacing these sections with the real-time video feed of her "partner" on Chatroulette, a site that allows people to randomly video chat with others. In the videos, we see Seror using this self-erasure to throw back her Chatroulette friend's gaze. Streams of men see their bodies where hers should be. Some are into the strange performance; they sit erect, fascinated by Seror's ability to superimpose her floating eye, mouth and remaining body parts on theirs. Other guys are unamused and leave the chat, perhaps aware they are being recorded. With this work, Seror deploys a kind of digital camouflage to subvert her partner's—and the viewer's—expectations of where a body begins and ends.

Seror complements these videos with a series of still photographs of pornographic GIFs, looping short videos made specifically for quick viewing on the Internet. Seror takes her photos directly off the

computer screen using long shutter speeds to blur movement. The most striking images, like *Face of a Virus /gif/feelmyself/08*, which shows a mass of interlocking fleshlike limbs and faces writhing on a bed, confuse just enough visual information to demand the viewer to complete the picture. In this way, Seror's photographs function like Rorschach tests, making one reflect on the reading of the image itself.

It's difficult to discuss Seror's work without acknowledging the famous German photographer Thomas Ruff, whose own photos of porn at first glance bear a striking similarity to the photos in "Hysteresis." Though they have similar subject matter, Ruff and Seror speak to different concerns. Ruff's big, sofa-size photos capture a pornographic scene as if it were in between frames, resulting in a double image. His photographs seem to be more about porn as an artifact of visual culture and in the stale white cube of the gallery they create a neutered engagement with the erotic body, the spectacle of objectification with little carnal pay off. Now some of Seror's works participate in a similar process, duplicating porn's aesthetic appeal while negating its function. This happens in images where the viewer can easily discern all elements in the scene, like in *Face of a Virus /gif/interns/01* where two women fellate an erect penis. Thankfully in many of Seror's other photographs the indistinct gesticulating body, made possible by an open lens (a stand-in for the voracious human eye) does something Ruff's photographs don't: they become other and challenge the Real, creating room for generative contemplation about bodies unmoored from prescriptive language and rigid connotation. They don't moralize or admonish porn in a conservative sense; instead, they make you self-aware of your erotic imagination. Depending on how you feel about your own sexual appetites this can be a very rewarding process indeed. ■

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