

ARTILLERY

WHITNEY HUBBS

By Kathryn Poindexter
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Woman no. 5, Woman no. 3, and Woman no 2 , 2016.

Whitney Hubbs's "Body Doubles" presents the artist's first attempts at color photography after a decade of working in black and white. Eleven midsize photographs feature anonymous women intermingling with provisional sets and props. These cropped and fractured limbs and torsos are, decidedly, the subjects of Hubbs's compositions; subjects that endure both abstraction and obscurity.

In *Woman no. 12 (Self-Portrait)* (2016), a very intentional red herring, we meet the vacant, trance-like stare of Hubbs herself, overexposed in a frontal, waist-up shot; the image lingers as a near-apparition. Holding her arms stolidly at ninety degree angles, her limbs become a secondary frame. This nearly-monochrome, colorless work stands in opposition to the others in the show, all of which exercise an assertive use of color that manifests in drapery, colored paper backgrounds, and improvised props. The works engage in a discourse on the pervasive relationships between women's bodies and directorial imperatives, and on how women choose to represent themselves and each other in modes of empowerment.

To pose is to perform the body. Some of Hubbs's photographs conjure tropes specific to historical representations of the female nude (passively reclined, seductively baring legs and breasts). Others show the body, closely cropped or from afar, in mid-action—seemingly (one wonders at the authenticity of the "action"). An ambiguity which begs the question: is this decisive moment the artist/camera's, the models', or a combination of both? In the new works, Hubbs places notions of play and theatricality at the helm, but exchanges them for the mystery and magic achieved in her black-and-white works. While the new formal strategies may place her in dialogue with other contemporary L.A. photographers like Heather Rasmussen or Anthony Lepore, it comes at the price of the special brand of otherworldliness and well-honed tonal mastery achieved in her colorless works.

Images courtesy the artist and M+B gallery

Whitney Hubbs: *Body Doubles* runs from March 19-May 7 at M+B gallery (612 North Almont Drive, Los Angeles, 90069).