

## ANETA GRZESZYKOWSKA *Selfie*

By David Rhodes



In using her body as both the image and site of her work, Aneta Grzeszykowska continues the dialogue and tradition of such artists as Cindy Sherman, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, and, most obviously in this exhibition, Alina Szapocznikow—another Polish sculptor whose work traffics in bodily fragmentation. As its title *Selfie* suggests, the subject of this exhibition is the construction of the self through photography. But Grzeszykowska's process is far from straightforward. Grzeszykowska has made objects in the likeness of parts of her own body and then photographed them, often as she holds them in her hands. The material used is pigskin, variously painted, stitched, and pinned. In "Take, Selfie #6" (2014), the artist holds a paintbrush with one hand whilst applying red paint to the lips of a head steadied by the other hand. Eight pins with black heads are positioned on either side of the nose and imitation teeth are convincingly in place behind the lips. Other areas of the head are blank and featureless—no eyes for example—and provoke charged unfamiliarity. The missing detail stimulates uncomfortable thoughts of erasure and deformation. When taken overall, the fragmentation implied from so many body parts prompts thoughts of a body actually rendered apart. Disambiguation is prevented both by the separation of a body into parts and the incompleteness of these parts. This Golem-like recreation of a body suggests the fractured and constantly changing nature of selfhood, a process requiring acts of creation as well as memory.



Aneta Grzeszykowska, "Selfie #6," 2014.  
Courtesy of Raster Gallery, Warsaw.

"Selfie #10" (2014) comprises two eyes with dark irises and lashes, surrounded by about an inch of facial skin. The artist's hand presents them delicately for our gaze. One of the eyes is raised to afford a better view; it also looks more directly back at us. The division of the eyes from a face and the different directions in which they direct their gaze raise issues of a divided self, perhaps. This estrangement of reality from a sense of wholeness and the eruption of conflicted rearrangements of a body also recall Surrealism. The grays, browns, and dark reds of the smooth leather used as a background in the photographs are quietly institutional. From a distance, they offer a balanced classicism in contrast to the disturbing *nature morte* tableau the photographs become upon closer inspection. A performative aspect of making is evidenced as the artist's hand can often be seen at work crafting the objects. Artifice and reality are integrated, as in the hybrid identities of stage actors in character.

The dead flesh with living flesh, meat with the female body, a deliberate circling around powerful conceits definitely not of a harmless kind. In insisting on a link between self-creation and mortality, Grzeszykowska points to the invention over time of identity and its inevitable obliteration in death.