Johanna Winters
HOWW TO WAYT

Sarah Minor
"Seeing Double:
The Sculptural Poetics of
HOWW TO WAYT"

The Grant Wood Art Colony
2022 – 2023
University of Iowa

Michael Dixon
Miscegenation Nation

Sarah Minor
"Life After Loving:
The Ode of
Miscegenation Nation"

HOWW TO WAYT
installation detail, 2023

(from L to R)

LIMMS (PEDICYUUR)
paper maché, acrylic, 2021/23

HANNDS
paper maché, acrylic, 2022-23

PROTAGONIST (COSTUUM)
paper maché bodice, acrylic, tape, 2023

SEEKUR (PRAKTISS)
collagraph with chine collé, 2022

SEETS No. 2 & 3
paper maché, 2021/23

HOWW TO WAYT
two channel video with sound, 8:12 duration, 2023
Cinematography by Auden Lincoln-Vogel
Production assistance from Jessie Kraemer

Sarah Minor
"Seeing Double:
The Sculptural Poetics of
HOWW TO WAYT"

The puppet's traces are nowhere and everywhere. She speaks to the viewer from the titles of prints and props. Her toes flex in anticipation while her hands rest on the gallery shelf. Nearby, a torso hangs empty, skin-like, on a custom welded frame.

In 2021 the artist Johanna Winters began a series of experimental performances that culminated in a two-channel video playing in a gallery, surrounded by "fragments of form." Her solo show *HOWW TO WAYT* is the working archive of a puppet-protagonist conjured by papier mâché appendages that serve alternately as Winters's costume and sculpture. At the center of the show, a video performance running on double screens delivers a synced pastiche of Winters's protagonist—a puppet bodice and head with human arms and legs—waiting for a romantic encounter in a motel room.

Winters is an artist who works on both the etching press and the stage, and in recent years her practice has explored the conditions of living in an aging femme body across both digital and physical media. As an extension of the artist's ongoing interest in persona as both confession and shield, *HOWW TO WAYT* develops its own semiotics, conjuring the contemporary regard of the self worn by the self.

Characterized by attention to texture at several scales, this show avows the inextricable link between Winters's sculpture, performance, and printmaking. Along the gallery's perimeter stand a life-sized head and torso, a pair of legs with painted toenails, another pair wearing perfect running shoes, and three chairs, all in papier mâché. Soft to the eye but hard to the touch, the limbs' ability to hover between figure and fragment undercuts superficial connections to "puppets" as we might know them. Winters's gestural appendages are pinched and blushing near nipples and knees, both less and more than human. Even the double screens where videos play are framed with a fleshy, flaking material suggesting they too may be sourced from a slightly different world than ours.

Winters describes herself inside and behind the puppet appendages as "the protagonist's embodied chaperone," a gentle caretaker manifesting "the persistent disappointment and humor of a body approaching middle age." In her videos, a radio groans as the puppet-protagonist sits at the edge of a double bed waiting, preparing, and gradually regarding herself. Inside the motel room, anachronistic objects like an 80s wallpaper border and a corded phone fix the protagonist in an era as well-preserved as the gendered gaze. On one channel, a set of double magnifying mirrors search the puppet's face like prying eyes while on the opposite screen, a human hand navigates between paper knees, practicing a tender erotics. An electric massager drags across puppet's scalp, trying out sensations. Puppet hands admire a ball of human hair at the edge of the bed before it rolls like a tumbleweed in a motel hairdryer's gale. Winters's video accrues a slippery, self-aware humor as human hands stretch a disposable shower cap repeatedly across the giant puppet head, where the cap snaps and flies away. Like the crack of a glowstick, opportunities for the viewer to laugh across Winters's work offer a release that illuminates. In these videos, Winters is performing both the puppet and the learned perceptions of aging, ugliness, and sensuality attached to bodies not young or beautiful.

Five prints hang among these appendages, each made using materials leftover from Winters's other works. In them, Winters has turned crinkled newsprint of papier mâché into relief prints. On one wall, a pair of busts printed with a carved-up manila folder are applied to the paper with chine collé. Their titles announce a third iteration of Winters's character through the puppet's own self-portraiture (*SEEKUR (REDDYING)*) and invite the reference of a Victorian silhouette. Like the echo of a skull with an electric massager pressed against it, Winters's prints "imply both a trace and an absence" inviting the viewer into the gap between an invented persona and the puppet's own sense of self.

Language becomes another medium throughout *HOWW TO WAYT*, a show that uses a phonetic spelling style in titles reminiscent of Chaucer's English and the emphatic broadsides made by the Bread & Puppet collective. In a poem from Winters's website called "opining nytt" ("opening night"), the artist writes:

> *wee arr en a meen-tymme*
> *nott nyss tymme*
> *forr withn reesunn*
> *plees rewarrd us with a speltng*
> *Wayt! For it!*

Like in her titles, Winters' poetics slow the reader like a gravel strip as the sound of each phonetic word torques its meaning. Like the manipulation of non-archival materials that translate the virtue of her linework into gestural limbs, Winters's language recalls the drag of aging while clarifying the tone of this work: slow and serious like the puppet-protagonist, gorgeous and peculiar like the mark making in her prints. If these sculptural appendages are fragments recalling the disappearing act of aging in a femme body, the long wait to be seen again, then the artist's invented language, like her seatless chairs, is also figural, expecting like chairs do for a body to receive them.

"I envisioned a HER before there was a body," says Winters about her puppet-protagonist. Waiting is a process of biding time, but maybe to wayt is also to imagine, to stretch, to age unwillingly, to endure a sense of immediate and conditional perception that endlessly weighs the female form. About "the female gaze" a theory that countered historic modes of visual objectification, film director Deborah Kampmeier said, "I don't gaze, I actually move through the world, feeling the world emotionally and sensorily and in my body." By watching Winters's video of a puppet awaiting romance amid her visceral parts, the viewer is invited into a third kind of looking, regarding a character who anticipates being seen, looking through the channels she uses to look at herself. Perhaps what Winters ultimately invites is not a counter to the linear "gaze" but an experience that refracts the act of looking, demanding witness in an era marked by new definitions of persona and surveillance.

↻ *rotate to read other essay*

LIMMS (PEDICYUUR)
paper maché, acrylic, 2021/23

PROTAGONIST (COSTUUM)
paper maché bodice, acrylic, tape, 2023

HANNDS
paper maché, acrylic, 2022-23

HOWW TO WAYT
two channel video with sound, 8:12 duration, 2023
Cinematography by Auden Lincoln-Vogel
Production assistance from Jessie Kraemer

HOWW TO WAYT (still image)
two channel video with sound, 8:12 duration, 2023
Cinematography by Auden Lincoln-Vogel
Production assistance from Jessie Kraemer

HOWW TO WAYT (still images)
two channel video with sound, 8:12 duration, 2023
Cinematography by Auden Lincoln-Vogel
Production assistance from Jessie Kraemer

HOWW TO WAYT (still image)
two channel video with sound, 8:12 duration, 2023
Cinematography by Auden Lincoln-Vogel
Production assistance from Jessie Kraemer

(from top L)

SEEKUR (PRAKTISS)
collagraph with chine collé, 2022

SEETS No. 2 & 3
paper maché, 2021/23

Sarah Minor
"Seeing Double:
The Sculptural Poetics of
HOWW TO WAYT"

HOWW TO WAYT
installation detail, 2023

(from L to R)

SEET No. 1
paper maché, 2021/23

PROTAGONIST (COSTUUM)
paper maché mask, acrylic, tape, 2023

SEEKUR (REDDYING)
collagraph with chine collé, 2022

Michael Dixon
Miscegenation Nation

Sarah Minor
"Life After Loving:
The Ode of
Miscegenation Nation"

The Grant Wood Art Colony
2022 – 2023
University of Iowa

Johanna Winters
HOWW TO WAYT

Sarah Minor
"Seeing Double:
The Sculptural Poetics of
HOWW TO WAYT"

A Mother's Love
Oil on canvas
48 × 48 inches, 20 × 20 inches
2023

A Mother's Wrath (I Could Have Won)
Oil on canvas
48 × 60 inches, 20 × 20 inches
2023

One of These Things is NOT Like the Others,
One of These Things Just Doesn't Belong
Oil on canvas
48 × 36 inches
2023

Sarah Minor
"Life After Loving: The Ode of *Miscegenation Nation*"

In 1958, Mildred and Richard Loving were sentenced to a year in prison and banned from the state of Virginia for 25 years for marrying each other. A white man and a Black-Rappahannock woman, the Lovings were in violation of anti-miscegenation laws, like the "Racial Integrity Act," which had banned marriage between white and Black Americans since Virginia was a colony.

Nine years later, in 1967, the U.S. Supreme court ruled in favor of the Lovings in the landmark civil rights decision "Loving v. Virginia," a vote that ruled U.S. anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. Another nine years later, the artist Michael Dixon was born to a white mother and a Black father. As a figurative oil painter, Dixon often paints large-scale self-portraits that consider the delicate highwire acts required for people who are perceived as "between" races in a country where stereotype often outlives legality. The artist's new series *Miscegenation Nation*, focuses on images of his mother, Peggy, honoring her in light of invisible tensions that ripple through the family albums of a mother raising a biracial child.

Miscegenation Nation extends the visual rhetoric of Dixon's recent series, "Pickaninny, 1976," by pairing portraits with miniature racist caricatures, documenting violent popular culture as footnotes to a family archive. Dixon's paintings are worked using an *alla prima* approach originally developed by plein air painters who were interested in a spontaneous, immediate style. The result is a series of paintings using photographic references and invested in the flatness of the snapshot, but with a virtuoso handling of material that allows for both blurry and bold lines to refute the even surface of their source.

"When the psychohistory of a people is marked by ongoing loss," writes bell hooks, "when entire histories are denied, hidden, erased, documentation can become an obsession." Dixon says that one effect of his early self-portraiture was to give a biracial audience the opportunity to see themselves on a gallery wall. The artist often developed source material by staging performances to visualize the embodied discomfort of being constantly asked "What are you?" This new series marks a shift in both process and reference by using only archival sources—both personal and historical photos—which Dixon uses to explore the tensions of contemporary biracial identity against the backdrop of a visual culture his country has pretended to forget. Central to *Miscegenation Nation* are portraits of the artist and his mother, who raised him, conjuring forms of family that can exist between two people.

As part of a contemporary art movement that engages social and political dialogues by drawing on autobiographical material from an artist's life, Dixon's personal history is this work's jumping off point, but not its only landing. Dixon, who identifies as a light-skinned Black man, says that growing up, his identity was often challenged in both white and Black contexts. Among his influences, Dixon cites the painter Robert Colescott, who employed a formal technique called the "one-two punch"—a cartoonish style paired with a vibrant palette—to consider the nuances of contemporary racism. Using a similar color logic, the figures in *Miscegenation Nation* float in a contextless, pale background the color of a blue legal pad. Dixon's series tests the self-portrait in different figural contexts, juxtaposed with a rotating list of icons and family identities. On one canvas, a young Peggy sits smiling, painted in nursery tones, beside a light-skinned baby in a bassinet. Below the portrait, on a smaller canvas turned upside down, a dark-skinned baby's face reflects the infant as if in an answer key. In Colescott's lineage, Dixon's formal decisions build tonal contrast, inviting the viewer to engage in dialogues they might not anticipate from a distance.

On the back wall hangs a family portrait featuring Dixon as a child, seated among his stepfather, sister, and mother. The canvas hangs beside an historic image of the Lovings mid-kiss. What may at first seem like subtle parallels across the series become explicit through Dixon's painted "asides," like the small canvas of a black rooster abutting the Loving's portrait, a reminder to the audience that many American laws extend the culture of chattel slavery. As the artist writes, laws that criminalized interracial marriage "allowed for white men to simultaneously control the sexual lives of white women and black men," following a century of non-consensual unions between enslaved people. Like Robert Colescott's painting "Knowledge of the Past is Key to the Future," which presents a "family tree" attaching a split-color figure to a white mother and a black father by nooses, Dixon converses with history, calling upon icons like the "black cock" to conjure the racist stereotypes that haunt contemporary family life.

Before digital storage, the family portrait was an object displayed in frames and stored in boxes, a visual form of the family unit. Factually, it told the story of neat lineage—a father's nose beside him in miniature on his son's face. For a biracial child, portraits of family hinted at a variation in form. In this series, Dixon seems to consider how the discomfort he experienced was rooted in violent histories America has tried to conceal. Borrowing the rhetoric of Alice Walker, who asked "What did it mean to be an artist in our grandmother's time? The question is cold enough to stop the blood," Dixon's work might invite the question "What did portraits of mixed-race families look like before 1976?"

In the 19th century Black Americans began using photography to defy stereotypes that depicted Black men as violent, Black women as servile, and Black children as expendable. After enduring more than a century of racist caricatures in advertising, the Black family portrait became a tool to refute stereotype through visual fact. By juxtaposing references from historic and personal archives, Dixon's work also speaks to ideas of truth attached to image-making technologies. By positioning snapshots among historic icons, *Miscegenation Nation* speaks to the role the camera and the self-portrait have played in countering image systems built to absolve modes of commerce that were based on dividing families.

↻ *rotate to read other essay*

The Lovings (Fuck Virginia!)
Oil on canvas
36 × 48 inches, 24 × 18 inches
2023

Peggy's Black Baby (Topsy-Turvy)
Oil on canvas
48 × 48 inches, 24 × 24 inches
2023

The Loving Generation
Oil on canvas
60 × 48 inches, 10 × 10 inches
2023

What's Good for the Goose,
is Good for the Gander
Oil on canvas
36 × 72 inches
2023

Sarah Minor
"Life After Loving: The Ode of *Miscegenation Nation*"

My Foundation
Oil on canvas
60 × 48 inches, 10 × 10 inches
2023