

## Review of Bryn Vargas' exhibition, *Animating Self*, by Scott Lercher

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The first thing I noticed when I walked into *Animating Self* was that the viewers were mostly sitting down on the floor to experience it. I had never seen such a viewing experience in a gallery before, except for something like Christian Marclay's *The Clock*. Speaking of which, I had also never seen any artist combine still images with video the way Bryn did before. She could've just settled on one medium or the other, but she made a wise decision to incorporate both of them into her piece. She intended *Animating Self* to be about one's relationship with their home, and how they've become part of it, and having the projected videos and images on top of them makes the work much stronger; the viewer is allowed to see her actually paint her body and "evolve into a part of her home" rather than just the final product.

I thought the placement of her images where her body stands in her projections was quite clever; it forces your eyes to focus on both the pictures and the videos they were placed in. However, it does make it harder for you to see what's going on within the projections, even if that was the intention. I also noticed that Bryn had each of her videos framed symmetrically as if you were watching a Wes Anderson movie (director of *Moonrise Kingdom*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*); I thought that was a nice touch. But to return to the sitting down experience subject, I realized that there was something unsettling about watching these projections while sitting on the floor as opposed to standing up. When you sit down to watch them, you feel smaller than the body-painting occurring within the projections. But if you stand up to watch it, you don't feel the impact as much. Also, I think the fact that the exhibition space's lights were all turned off might've had something do with everyone being compelled to sit down to watch.

My favourite out of all the projections would have to be one in the bedroom in which she paints herself almost entirely in brown paint, or red; it's hard to tell. It resonated with me the most because it was the most unsettling; it was like she was painting herself entirely in blood. However, the piece would've been stronger if every wall of the space had a video of her doing some body painting. I know the space has more than 4 walls, but she could've used that extra wall to project a 5th video (i.e. in the bathroom). Then the viewer would've felt more immersed by the piece, and there would've been more weight to it.

For someone who's still an art student, Bryn has done really well with *Animating Self*. But then again, having known her from being in the same fine arts faculty, I never doubted she would. I'd never before thought about what it means to be part of one's home, and I certainly hadn't experienced an art project the way I had with her piece before. And if you do check out *Animating Self*, which I strongly recommend you do while you still can, I think you'll get more out of it by sitting down to experience it.

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