BETWEEN HISTORY AND THE BODY

JULY 9 TO OCTOBER 16, 2015
Opening Reception, July 9 from 6:00-8:00pm

Left to right: Brendan Fernandes, As One I, 2015, 15” x 19” Silver Gelatin Print. As One II, 2015, 15” x 19” Silver Gelatin Print. Commissioned by Seattle Art Museum.

New York, June 17, 2015 — The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation presents Between History and the Body, an exhibition looking closely at the ways in which cultural identity is defined, how it is used as a force of exclusion, and how it works as a unifying and transformative energy among artists of diverse cultural backgrounds. The exhibition will be on view July 9 to October 16, 2015 at The 8th Floor, located at 17 West 17th Street, New York City.

Between History and the Body features artists Elia Alba, Firelei Baez, Nick Cave, Jean-Ulrick Désert, Nicolás Dumit Estévez, Brendan Fernandes, Jeffrey Gibson, Shaun Leonardo, Ana Mendieta, Paul Anthony Smith, Chungpo Tsering and Saya Woolfalk, who work across a variety of media including sculpture, painting, photography, performance and video. Together, these artists generate dialogue on cultural identity and history through representation of the body as an active force in ritual, both historic and imagined, and as an agent in the production of relics that communicate narratives of the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa.

Several artists in the exhibition work with masking and modes of dress. Elia Alba’s If I were a… video features artist Nicolás Dumit Estévez performing in three different photo-transferred suits that depict a pastiche of racial identities. Paul Anthony Smith’s photographs of youths in his home city of Kingston, Jamaica are transformed with
diamond patterns, which mask the figure and suggest additional layers of cultural experience. Jean-Ulrick Désert’s *The Passion* is comprised of a series of photographic portraits of figures dressed in football fan costumes—common in Germany and other parts of Europe—but produced all in white, removing the patriotic symbols that normally adorn the outfits. *The Passion* reveals the tribal qualities of mainstream identification that can be found in sports culture, where otherwise questionable aggression is acceptable.

Other artists in the exhibition, such as Shaun Leonardo, call into question which bodies matter. His recent drawings of slain African American men like Michael Brown and Eric Garner are paired with self-portraits that depict the artist as a wrestler in struggle with the invisible man.

Brendan Fernandes and Nicolás Dumit Estévez’s videos *Foe* and *Tongue Training* both demonstrate the nuance of voice and pronunciation as signifiers of class and cultural identity. In Estévez’s case, the erotic and comic converge in his tongue training. Fernandes’ *Foe* documents the artist’s attempt to learn the correct Indian and Canadian English pronunciation of phrases from J.M. Coetzee’s book (also titled *Foe*).

Saya Woolfalk and Firelei Baez create objects and paintings, respectively, that conflate historical information with futuristic visions of cultural possibilities. Woolfalk’s *Empathic Hides* are relics from an ongoing project in which women, called the *Empathics*, discover bones that are believed to be remains of plant-human hybrids. A parallel project called *ChimaTEK* is a fictional product line conceived to enable customers to transcend ordinary limits, including those imposed by racism, sexism and ethnocentricity. Baez’s paintings and collages depict the female figure and body parts within reimagined ethnographic patterns, calling for a more empowered relationship to our own bodies and history.

*Between History and the Body*, curated by Artistic Director Sara Reisman, is the second in a series of exhibitions centered on the newly focused mission of The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, with an emphasis on art and social justice.

**About The 8th Floor**

The 8th Floor is a nonprofit exhibition and event space established in 2010 by Shelley and Donald Rubin. As a space for enacting the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation’s initiative, Art and Social Justice, The 8th Floor explores art’s role as an instrument for social change in the 21st century. The 8th Floor presents an annual program of Foundation-organized interdisciplinary and experimental programming that is free and open to the public, including contemporary art exhibitions, performances and salon-style discussions. Schools groups are encouraged. Viewing hours are Tuesday through Friday, 11am–6pm, and Saturday by appointment. For more information, please visit [the8thfloor.org](http://the8thfloor.org).
About The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation
The Foundation believes in art as a cornerstone of cohesive, resilient communities and greater participation in civic life. In its mission to make art available to the broader public, in particular to underserved communities, the Foundation provides direct support to, and facilitates partnerships between, cultural organizations and advocates of social justice across the public and private sectors. Through grantmaking, the Foundation supports cross-disciplinary work connecting art with social justice via experimental collaborations, as well as extending cultural resources to organizations and areas of New York City in need. For more information, please visit sdrubin.org.

Join the conversation with the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation on Facebook (The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation), Twitter (@rubinfoundation) and Instagram (@rubinfoundation) with the hashtags #The8thFloor #RubinFoundation #BetweenHistoryandBody and #ArtandSocialJustice.

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