

# TAKING UP SPACE

Forming Body and Identity



A **SPACE** *for* **DIALOGUE** 111

HOOD MUSEUM OF ART, DARTMOUTH

The diverse American artists of *Taking Up Space*, working from the 1970s to the present, consider questions of identity and the boundaries of personal and public space through representations of the human form. Every figure, whether the artist's own or that of a loved one, explores intimacy. Daniel Heyman's *Tattoo* series captures ephemeral moments of relaxation and companionship between the artist and his lovers during a summer beach trip; the men are exposed on the beach, and yet they appear comfortable in both their nudity and their sensuality. By comparison, Francesca Woodman's *Untitled*, from the *Space<sup>2</sup>* series, depicts her own naked body from a voyeuristic camera angle. Though she appears trapped in a glass display case, her hand emerges cautiously, suggesting her looming escape. What kind of space do their bodies inhabit, and how do they cross their respective social boundaries?

Through these works of art we access private aspects of the artists' experiences and the complex relationships they have with the self. The direct eye contact we have with Marisol, through her *Self-Portrait*, encourages a recognition of the internal struggles we all face. Her reaching hands call out to us, fingers interlocked. The turmoil she experiences, however, is neatly enclosed within the outline of her face in profile. By breaking the fourth wall, she invites audiences into an emotional moment that is often kept private from the rest of the world.

As human beings, we construct our sense of self as we move physically and emotionally through the events of our lives. Through his

photomontages, John O'Reilly explores these acts of self-construction, and the internal conflicts that often arise. In *Dogtown*, he expresses his personal relationship with queer identity, his domestic environment, and the physical landscape of the place he calls home. Sexuality, gender, and the relationship we develop with our identity is self-constructed. There is no singular path to understanding oneself.

Perhaps we can call upon queer theory, an area of scholarly study developed in the late twentieth century, which aims to "transgress conventional understandings of gender and sexuality," and to disrupt binary-based boundaries.<sup>1</sup> Through this theoretical lens, the human body is not only subject to change over time, but also becomes a fluid character that can cross socialized borders of both sexuality and gender.

Our society imposes binary restrictions on the body and dictates our lives based on differences (male vs. female, gay vs. straight, black vs. white, etc.), rather than with an understanding of the spectrum upon which we all move about the world. Here, we must be open to thoughts of uncertainty and change—no one person holds the authority over self-identity. We are physical beings shaped by the accumulation of knowledge, emotion, and events, and live in a reality that shifts by the millisecond. To live freely in this chaos, we must allow ourselves to take up space, as our identities flow and change.

The artists included in this exhibition emphasize this concept of fluidity, allowing their





pictured subjects to cross socialized boundaries. Look to Martine Gutierrez's *Real Dolls* series, where she depicts herself traversing spaces of feminized gender expression, sexualized female bodies, and shifting racial identity. As a self-identified, non-binary transgender woman, she often expresses her own fluid movements across gender binaries in art. In this series, she performs hyperfemininity, presenting herself as four different sex dolls. She adds varying racial markers to her "dolls," such as skin color. In crossing these boundaries, she introduces complicated conversations about sexualization, racial and ethnic identity, and appropriation. Does she have the authority to generate these conversations in this way? Where do we draw the line in art?

Though many of the artists in *Taking Up Space* face similar social obstacles, not all the artists confront these conflicts in the same way. Unable to find a space for herself within the norms of society, Laura Aguilar accepts her body by rooting herself in the forested landscapes of Texas in *Motion #46*. Instead of attempting

to conform to societal views of femininity, she explores her body, worth, and identity in nature. The three women pictured twist and morph around the whirling branches of the trees: a physical representation of the simultaneous becoming and unbecoming of the self. Here we see that femininity and womanhood cannot be singularly defined.

Do we have agency to choose who to become when fashioning our sense of self? *Taking Up Space* reshapes the way that we view the human body in its constant state of formation, transformation, and reformation. How do you express your identities?

Milanne Berg '24  
Homma Family Intern

#### NOTES

1. Hidalgo, D. Antoinette and Barber, Kristen, Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "queer," accessed August 8, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/queer-sexual-politics>.

## CHECKLIST

Daniel A. Heyman, American, born 1963. *Untitled [John]*, from the *Tattoo Series*, 2002, chine collé etching. Gift of Vincent Renou; 2005.32.3

Daniel A. Heyman, American, born 1963. *Untitled [Vincent]*, from the *Tattoo Series*, 2002, chine collé etching. Gift of Vincent Renou; 2005.32.7

Martine Gutierrez, American, born 1989. *Ebony 3*, from the series *Real Dolls*, 2013, archival inkjet print. Purchased through a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Hazen, by exchange; 2014.25.11

Martine Gutierrez, American, born 1989. *Mimi 1*, from the series *Real Dolls*, 2013, archival inkjet print. Purchased through a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Hazen, by exchange; 2014.25.13

John O'Reilly, American, 1930–2021. *Dogtown*, February 27, 2009, polaroid, color copier, halftone, silver print montage. Gift of Jeffrey A. Pond, Class of 1967, in honor of the Founding of Triangle House at Dartmouth College; 2015.18.1

Francesca Woodman, American, 1958–1981. *Untitled* from *Space<sup>2</sup>, Providence, Rhode Island*, 1975–1976, gelatin silver print. Purchased through a gift from Marina and Andrew E. Lewin, Class of 1981; 2013.12.2

Laura Aguilar, American, 1959–2018. *Motion #46*, 1999, gelatin silver print. Purchased through the Elizabeth and David C. Lowenstein '67 Fund, the Edward, Julia, Victoria, and Christopher Hansen Fund for Photographic Acquisitions, and the Sondra and Charles Gilman Jr., Foundation Fund; 2022.12.7

Marisol, American (born Venezuelan, in France), 1930–2016. *Self-Portrait*, 1973, etching on English handmade paper. Purchased through William B. Jaffe and Evelyn A. Jaffe Hall Fund; PR.973.428

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The exhibition *Taking Up Space: Forming Body and Identity*, part of the museum's student-curated *A Space for Dialogue* series, is on view at the Hood Museum of Art, March 3–April 23, 2023.

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Cover image: Laura Aguilar, *Motion #46*, 1999. © Laura Aguilar

Inside left: Daniel A. Heyman, *Untitled [Vincent]*, 2002. © Daniel A. Heyman

Inside right: Martine Gutierrez, *Real Doll, Ebony 3*, 2013. © Martine Gutierrez; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York

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