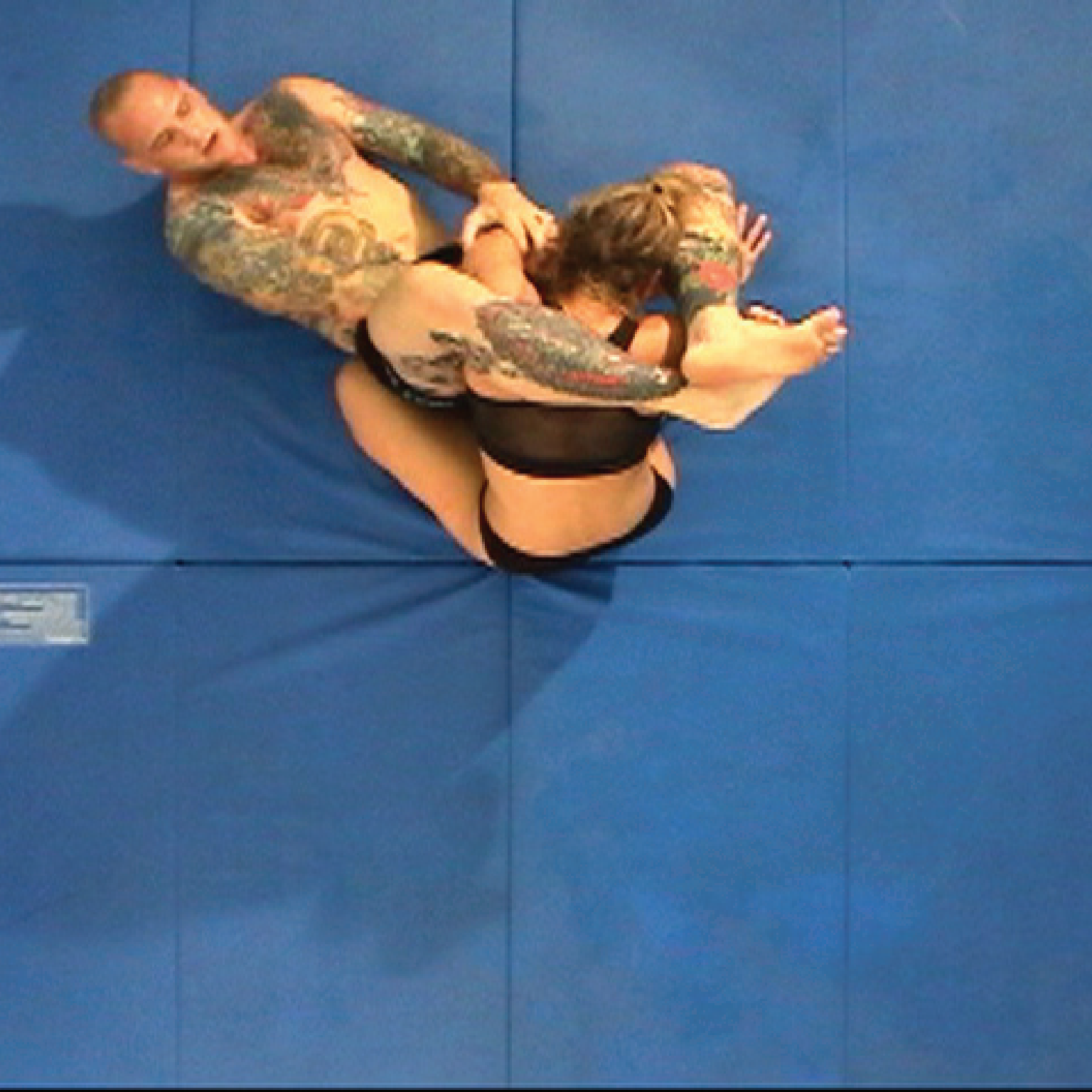


JENNIFER LOCKE * ACTIONS







In the work of San Francisco artist Jennifer Locke, various tangents cross paths to illuminate ideas about power, the body, seduction and sexuality, the gaze, objectification, and desire. Locke works in a combination of performance, short form video, and digital photography and these preferred media are a clue to the question of who is really in charge, which perspective reigns most dominant, and who is most central to these constructed voyeurisms.

It may appear to be the artist herself, who figures centrally in all the works and whose actions reveal a simultaneous process of revealing and concealing both the body and the persona the body represents. In pouring white glue over herself, skipping herself into an anxious sweat grappling on a wrestling mat, or shifting poses as an artist's model, Locke is performing actions that complicate questions of desire and the gaze that feeds it.

While some of her works act as documents of live performances and others are performed for the camera, all the works share a concise, direct visual aspect that draws upon the simple visual elements in the work: the residual blue video glow as an extended halo around the artist in *Glue*; the blue mat, stark black figure, and white background of *Fountain*; the placid blue grid of *Match* foregrounding the scene's intensity. Even as singular images, Locke's images are stark and startling. A fetishized rubber figure skipping rope is alternately sexy, unnerving, ambiguous, and strangely funny. The momentary whiting-out of face and body in a cascade of glue is equally arresting. The anxious physicality of wrestlers seen from above seems more urgent when photographed against the soft blue ground.

She is the lead protagonist to these actions, all of which contain degrees of aggression about them. Even in *Artist/Model* (where the artist sketching her appears himself muscular and dominant), it is Locke who takes charge when the Artist forgets his place. Compliant to all his posing requests, she firmly objects when he references a pose in relation to the cameras shooting the scene. The power dynamic between artist and model breaks down as Locke the Artist has to reposition her hired Artist/Actor in his proper place in the constructed equation. You concentrate on your drawing, I'll take care of the camera, she informs him. It's an odd, spontaneous moment that breaks the fictional construct and, in doing so, dramatically emphasizes the question of dominance and objectification.

In all these works, Locke utilizes small gestures that address sexuality without actually making any of the works about sex. Knowing that the artist is pouring white glue over herself does not veil the intense sensuality of the act—the proximity of the camera in this piece creates an extended moment of powerful intimacy. A full body rubber suit is an emphatic fetish that connotes sex, as body is veiled but its sexualized form is accentuated. The serious physicality enacted on the wrestling mat treads extremely close to the overtly sexual.

And the posings of an artist's model are always about concocting an object of attraction.

And yet the gestures in each of these works do not add up to work about sex. Locke presents the body less as a desirable object that can be had and more as bait to lure the viewer. The body is used as a mechanism of misdirection. Her black body suit in *Fountain* may be the most alluringly sexual image in the works, even more so than portions of works that depict full nudity. The athletic, sexual silhouette breathing hard into a wireless microphone while in the frivolous act of skipping rope most effectively creates an air of mystery around the body and in this ambiguity is a more potent allure than a nude artist's model or even a man and woman grappling on a wrestling mat. However, these gestures of near-sex and extreme intimacy seem contrived to entice the eye, while the real subject of the drama lies hidden in plain sight.

Perspective is a critical component in Locke's works. In *Glue*, the tight shot forces the viewer into an intimate relationship with the subject. In *Match*, the God's eye view keeps us hovering above the intense relationship playing itself out. In *Fountain*, it is only the camera that is allowed full access to the artist's performance (the latter portion is played out for the audience from behind a partition and via a closed circuit camera). In the video for *Artist/Model*, two perspectives are presented, one of which conceals the model from view, the other displaying the total relationship playing out. (A third perspective occurs as well, as Locke digitally photographs the Artist sketching her while she is posing.)

In all of these, the ongoing question is where power resides. Who, exactly, is dominant in these vignettes? One could suggest Locke submits to the materiality of glue, to physical exertion and body fluids, to a more powerful wrestling component, and to the gaze of the artist—and she does—yet she often gives as good as she gets. The power relationships within the work are never entirely clear. The dried glue is peeled off as one might shed old skin. The physical exertions of fetishized skipping are washed away with a cleansing cascade of water. Locke never cries uncle on the wrestling mat—and while she does tap out, she does not give in easy. And while she poses as requested, she never adopts a submissive attitude.

The only participant in these actions that remains dominant is the camera. It is not a dramatic incident or action, however compelling, that holds ultimate sway. Even with Locke's own strong, sometimes aggressive, presence in the works, there is an acknowledgement that even she (and, of course, we) ultimately concedes to the camera's dominance.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator





JENNIFER LOCKE • *Actions* • January 17 to February 21, 2009

Jennifer Locke has exhibited in venues such as the 48th Venice Biennale; Air de Paris, Paris; the 9th Havana Biennial; the Basel Art Fair, Kunsthalle, Basel; La Panaderia, Mexico City; Palais de Beaux-Arts, Brussels; Hallwalls, New York; and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. She has curated for Artists Television Access and Queen's Nails Annex, co-produced a cable access show, sung in punk bands, and given a variety of workshops. She received her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and was awarded the 2006 Chauncey McKeever Award. Locke is currently an adjunct professor at St. Mary's College of California and also teaches at the San Francisco Art Institute.

www.jenniferlocke.net

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CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER
341 DELAWARE AVENUE
BUFFALO, NY 14202
www.hallwalls.org