

PRESS RELEASE

Heather Cantrell - *A Study in Portraiture: Act II*

Curated by Caryn Coleman

25 November - 19 December, 2009

Private view: Friday, 27 November from 6:30-9pm

MOTInternational

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From John Baldessari to David Yow, **Heather Cantrell** has always looked within her own tribe of artists, curators, and musicians in her exploration of community and subcultures. Now, she looks to the London art scene with *A Study in Portraiture: Act II* as part of her ongoing international ethnographic study that simultaneously documents, subverts, and reveals identities of the art world through performative portraiture. Having debuted in Los Angeles this summer, **MOT International** hosts the second in this series as the gallery turns into an 'in-house' photography studio for 'Act II'.

Members of the London art community are being invited to participate by having their portrait taken during performative sessions, or happenings, that punctuate the exhibition. Using hand-painted backdrops with a variety of costume and prop materials, Cantrell embraces the 'theater of the portrait' and pushes her role as an artist/director by making each exhibition of *A Study in Portraiture* a city-specific act in a play (hence the titling 'Act I', 'Act II', etc.) where the sitter has the ability to realize and portray a character. Referencing the 1960s West African photographs by Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibe as well as the 18th century society portraits by British painter Thomas Gainsborough, she addresses the historical complicity in constructed identity and image assumed by both subject and artist. Like these artists, she also documents a social culture: hers being the exclusive contemporary art world. And through the interrogation of individual art communities (Los Angeles, London, New York, Chicago, and more), she and those who participate jointly construct a referential identity of the art world as a whole.

Involving much more than mere photography, her practice entails a conceptual strategy that incorporates performance, theater, painting, sculpture, and sociology. The resulting photographic image represents these elements in one captured moment with all its beautiful ambiguity and intrigue. It is a 'play-still.'

Cantrell's portrait studio remains in the gallery functioning as the site for scheduled weekly sessions throughout the duration of the show and as an installation when not in use. There will be selected framed portraits from 'Act I' on display and instant 4x5 photographs will be added to the wall as each London session progresses. The website www.studyinportraiture.com is a documentary component to the series featuring project history, images of the sessions, portrait photographs, and news.

Heather Cantrell (lives/works in Los Angeles) received her MFA from UCLA in 2001 and her BFA from the Maryland Institute, College of Art in 1995. Her work has been shown in the touring museum exhibition *Likeness: Portraits of Artists by Other Artists* curated by Matthew Higgs (*Singing Sirens* is featured on catalog cover) and the recent group exhibitions *LA: 2019 Cults, Collectives and Cocooning* curated by Ciara Ennis at 18th Street Art Center, *Celebration* at Circus Gallery, *Group Show* at Black Dragon Society, and *Flowing, Pulsing, Beating, Burning* curated by Roger Dickes. Solo gallery shows include *Century's End* at sixspace in Los Angeles and *Extended Family* at Newman Popiashvili Gallery in New York. Reviews of her work have been published in *Artforum*, *Los Angeles Weekly*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Frieze*, *Index*, and *Wired Magazine*. *A Study in Portraiture: Act I* debuted at Kinkead Contemporary in Los Angeles this past summer.

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