

Talia

Fellow artist Sahra Motalebi gives an intimate look to

Talia Chetrit's pictures of latent events and how they

capture the performative aspects of photography.







I had forgotten to remember that she was going to call me. Talia had been on a long train ride somewhere that day; I don't know where I was. It didn't matter. We had spent several hours in the middle months of 2018 talking about her latest body of work, which would overlap in three exhibitions in Toronto, New York and Milan. We've also had a much larger conversation over the last several years—both in and out of our studios—that has given further dimension to my thinking about these photographs. Early on in our friendship, Talia and I perfected a kind of exercise in exchange, as women and as artists, of very personal stories and anecdotes (too easily reduced to themes of sex and sexuality)—some recalled as acts of defiance, some in eidetic ecstasy, and most experimental to the point of ruin—all of which, unsurprisingly, are also present in this work for me. From the point of view of artistic practice as a kind of self-reflexive index, for anyone who knows Talia's work, there is a succinctness in the various gestures and operations at play in these latest shows. These images build not only on her previous projects, but also on the precision that she has harnessed from the experiential import and the lived context of her practice as a whole. No one needs convincing of the value, and certainly not the historical precedence, of female photographers using the premises of their medium to challenge the processes of image-making. Talia has specifically talked about her delight in the staging of content that will force the disclosure of

otherwise latent (or hidden) dynamics and activity—the artist having actual sex in socks and a sweater in her studio, or the gendered contrivances within her own family relations, as explored in her previous series. In a back and forth earlier this year, Talia described her desire to “capture the wrong performance,” freighting her picture-taking with an intersubjective concept that I have found especially inspiring. The various methods she employs in documenting events *en passant*—those involving the people and stuff in her life and in her work space—allow her to call into question the performative aspects of photography, of course, but also potentially its modes of production. Her take on affect as it relates to this documentation, and her pointing out of the constraints of the format itself, are uniquely suited to broadcast her artistic engagement with her own subject-positioning as well. From my view, this authorial agency can't be underestimated and, from a critical perspective, needn't preclude her use of her own body in juxtaposition to images of objects abstracted to appear life-like, or the material traces of the photographic process itself. Talia is open to any discussion about intentionality. At a time when much of what we deal with in the realm of images (online and otherwise) is designed for mindless proliferation, textual misattribution and cynical consumption, her work isn't without context or imperative. Still, Talia's ambivalence about being onstage frustrates our instincts to nail her down. She told me about watch-

ing several adult women within a group looking at her photograph *Untitled (Bottomless #4)* (2015) at the Whitney Museum last spring. Talia overheard one of several women audibly expressing her revulsion at seeing a vagina in the photograph—as if this person had never seen such a thing, never mind that the genitalia belonged to the artist whom we see taking the photograph in the image, or that an astounding number of other people, including her companions standing there with her, also possess them. It isn't a given that this exposé itself might have also served as an explanation here—in this case, Talia had collapsed the distance between herself as the photographer, as the subject, and as the object. And yet, the artist had also actively created an occlusion for the viewer amounting to a distancing effect that puts much into relief, including her own practice.

We discussed this visitor's response in light of the many critical intersections provoked by this photo, the likes of which, at least within Talia's oeuvre, had not previously been shown in the US. Should we read Talia's apparent delight in toeing the precipice of misinterpretation as a kind of tactical resistance? If you ask her what it is exactly that she is photographing, or why she chose a particular edit, she is likely to answer you with another question: a set up. It shouldn't come as any surprise, then, that in looking at this work, we find our own assumptions mirrored back at us, ourselves fully implicated. ©

All images courtesy of the artist.

Talia Chetrit (American, b. 1982) is an artist and photographer who lives and works in New York. She is represented by Sie + Hoke, Düsseldorf, and Kaufmann Repetto, Milan/New York, where she recently staged a solo exhibition of new work.

Sakura Motahabi (American, b. 1979) is a visual artist, vocalist and writer based in New York. She has recently shown her work at such venues as the Kitchen, SculptorsCenter and MoMA PS1, New York.



