

Whitney Hubbs  
Patricia Voulgaris  
Mouse Trap

Centa Schumacher  
Observational Astronomy

# About the Artists

**Whitney Hubbs** received her BFA from the California College of the Arts in 2005 and an MFA at UCLA in 2009. She was involved in the punk rock riot grrrl community from a young age, where she made fanzines, organized art shows, and participated in performances. Recent solo exhibitions include *Body Doubles* at M+B Gallery and at the California Museum of Photography, Riverside. Hesse Press published the artist's first monograph, *Woman In Motion*. Her second monograph, *Say So*, was published by SPBH Editions in Spring 2021. She is an Assistant Professor Photography at Alfred University. Hubbs is currently represented by M+B Gallery in Los Angeles and Situations Gallery in New York City.

**Centa Schumacher** is a lens-based artist and educator based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and is the former director of the now-closed gallery Phosphor Project Space. Centa has shown her work nationally, including *Paradise Palase* in Brooklyn, NY, *Aggregate Space* in Oakland, CA, and an upcoming solo exhibition at the *Carbon Copy Project Space* in Louisville, KY. She received her MFA from San Francisco State University.

**Patricia Voulgaris** is an artist and educator from New York. She graduated from the School of Visual Arts in 2013 with a BFA in Photography. Her work has been exhibited in numerous exhibitions including Aperture Foundation, Rubber Factory, Red Hook Labs and Baxter Street at CCNY. Her photographs have been featured in publications such as *Der Greif*, *Vice Magazine*, *Dear Dave Magazine*, *The British Journal of Photography* and *New York Magazine*. She is the grant recipient of the Lucie Foundation, Aaron Siskind Foundation and SVA Faculty Award.

# I. Introduction

## **Whitney Hubbs and Patricia Voulgaris: Mouse Trap**

Photography has the power to lure viewers into spaces and ideas that they might not expect. Some images that at first glance appear ordinary can, with closer and longer inspection, reveal themselves to be ominous, outrageous, or sublime. Patricia Voulgaris and Whitney Hubbs excel at creating such confounding and discomfiting images. They use the metaphor of a mouse trap to describe images which can pull in a viewer's gaze and then, without warning, snap at them. They are determined to investigate ideas around power and control in images and media, and in real life.

Voulgaris' work contains an ambiguous story of escape and destruction that subtly interrogates the power dynamics of victim and savior, while Hubbs is motivated by the way a photograph can be a container for atmosphere and pure feeling.

Both artists confront how women's bodies are depicted and perceived in contemporary culture through their experimental, playful, and risky photographs. The show's title presents an open question of who is truly empowered, who is the mouse and what is the trap?

## **Centa Shumacher: Observational Astronomy**

Uninterested in what the camera can do as a factual recording device, Centa Schumacher works with a homemade lens assembled from vintage camera elements, creating a tool that distorts light and perspective. She views this tool as an intermediary between the material world and the spiritual. 'Observational Astronomy' presents works that use abstraction and luminance to create spaces that feel out of the ordinary and invoke a sense of transcendence. Schumacher sees her practice as a way to transform the mundane lived experience into something elevated and unrecognizable.



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## II. Photography and Performance

Photography and **performance art** have been interconnected since the 1960s, when **avant-garde** artists explored the experimental possibilities of each **medium**. Patricia Voulgaris uses elements of performance through costume, props and poses, to create fiction and narratives. Whitney Hubbs performs with her body to explore ideas and emotions around womanhood, failure, aging, and disgust. While her self-portrait *Untitled (Dolphin)* has elements of performance, Hubbs prefers to see such photographs as part of an expanded field of sculpture. She is interested in documenting the performing body as an object through photography.

### Questions for Looking:

- Are the self-portraits by Whitney Hubbs a performance for the camera or a performance for herself?
- Performance art is usually experienced live. However, Whitney Hubbs is interested in documenting the performing body through still photography. What is gained or lost by artists documenting performance through this medium of photography? How does a still photograph of performance affect your response?
- Artists are often inspired by popular culture such as film and literature to construct and perform imagined narratives. Can adopting a fictitious character, such as a witch or savior, serve as a form of self-portraiture? How can performing fictional characters speak to someone's real personality or real-life experiences?



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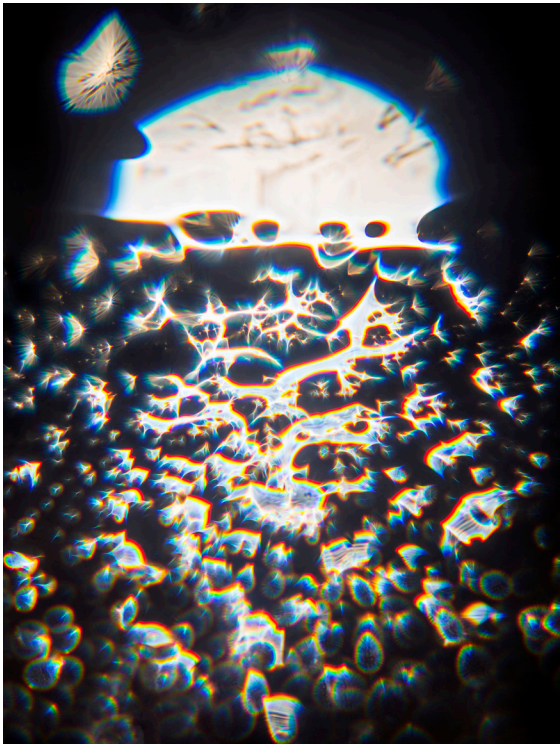
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### III. Constucting Suspense

Hubbs' recent self-portraiture, such as *Untitled (Ectoplasm)*, creates a feeling of suspense. It does this by showing the female body in-between states of movement and action, often in situations where the artist appears to be at risk. In *Untitled (Ectoplasm)*, Hubbs' tight cropping of the composition heightens this suspense and provokes anxiousness or nervousness. Patricia Voulgaris often creates suspense in her work by omitting details, leaving the viewer afraid of what it cannot see. For example, Voulgaris' short video *Man In The Woods* shows a male narrator threatened by a powerful and undefinable creature while camping in secluded nature. This film is full of suspense because the viewer's senses are limited. We can hear descriptions of the animal but cannot see it clearly, leaving our imagination free to explore dark emotions such as fear and uncertainty.

#### Questions for Looking

- Thinking further about Patricia Voulgaris' short video *Man In The Woods*, what stages would the artist need to go through to make an artwork this way? How does the environment add to the sense of suspense?
- Patricia Voulgaris creates suspense in this exhibition by leaving ambiguity in her work. Often a depicted situation remains unresolved, or the viewer is unsure if a character is harmful or nurturing. Why might we interpret artwork differently from others when such ambiguity exists?
- The controlled composition and lighting in Whitney Hubbs' self-portrait create a dramatic image. The **aesthetics** of this image prioritize immediacy as its directness instantly captures the viewer's curiosity. This visual style is often used to depict women in glossy advertisements, such as in television, magazines, or social media. Does this self-portrait make you rethink such images you see in the media? If so, how?



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## IV. Picturing Transformation

Artists Patricia Voulgaris and Centa Schumacher both explore themes of **transformation**. Several of Voulgaris' photographs in this exhibition, such as *Witches House* and *Dunk*, refer to physical or **psychological** destruction. However, Voulgaris sees destruction as an integral part of life, which individuals must endure to create new states of existence. Similarly, artist Centa Schumacher believes that chaos is an essential first stage of creating change. Both these photographs suggest moments of release after a period of destruction or chaos has ended.

### Questions for Looking

- In Voulgaris' photograph *Untitled*, how does the physical pose of the female body suggest release? What kinds of emotions can be communicated by body language?
- The composition of Shumacher's photograph, *VOIDS, etc (intermediary)*, prompts visual associations with sunrises, indicating a new beginning with light emerging from the darkness. Pick one of Centa Schumacher's photographs to focus on. How do you respond to the abstract shapes in your chosen image? What memories or emotions do these shapes inspire?
- Both of the photographs shown here use intense contrast between light and dark. What moods or feelings do you associate with this use of contrast? Does this contrast encourage clarity in how you respond to the image?



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## V. Community Perspectives

Community Perspectives is an ongoing series where people from diverse disciplines and backgrounds respond freely to images in our exhibitions.

### **Clare Drobot reflects on Patricia Voulgaris' *Witch***

A woman's body in motion  
is a thing of mystery.  
Her feet firmly planted  
black cotton socks  
rooted in the cold grass  
fabric clinging to her calves.

A woman's body in motion  
is a thing of power.  
Limbs akimbo  
keening and twisting  
hair wild and blowing  
A wraith shrouded in vapor

A woman's body in motion  
is a thing of beauty.  
In shape and form a remembrance  
of other women who moved  
in darkness, silhouetted  
by the glow of unseen sources.

A woman's body in motion  
is a thing to be feared.  
Her mystery a danger  
Her power somehow sinister  
Her beauty to be scrutinized  
an alchemy of her sex.

*Clare Drobot is a dramaturg, producer, and playwright based in Pittsburgh. She serves as the Co-Artistic Director of City Theater alongside Monteze Freeland and Marc Masterson.*

## **Chanel Blanchett reflects on Whitney Hubbs’ *Untitled (Dolphin)***

To the surprise of no one with their eyes open, we're living in a time where almost everything we knew or previously experienced has been turned on its head. Topsy turvy in the extreme.

*Dolphin* manages to evoke this upside down feeling in a way that doesn't reject the vibe of the current moment and instead adds a youthful exuberance to the overall feeling of discombobulation.

I'm reminded of playing games with my class of 5-6 year old theater students; there was delightful surprise when we played animal charades and the shapes were nothing my imagination could've dreamed. I would've scream-laughed if any of my students struck this pose and told me “dolphin,” and I would've loved it.

With this photograph, Whitney Hubbs experiments with perspective and physicality in a way that makes me think, prompts me to giggle, and vaguely terrifies me in the best way. It's Halloween meets yoga meets childhood dress-up meets interpretive dance. It's both of this year and also somehow nostalgic. Looking at the way the photographed body is folded and twisted, I feel the urge to invert my body as well in the hopes that I'll find a new way to gaze not only at the photograph but also the rest of my environment.

The dolphin's a pretzel. I'm a pretzel. The world's a pretzel. It's a whole mood.

*Chanel Blanchett is a multidisciplinary theater artist dedicated to creating visibility for those who are unseen by the movements they create and the societies they exist within. In addition to her current role as Programming Manager at Kelly Strayhorn Theater, she is a writer, visual artist, director, and teaching artist. Chanel's work both creatively and administratively centers around making space for voices and bodies in more rooms, with a special interest in empowering and creating opportunities for black women and black youth.*



# Glossary

<b>Aesthetics</b>	Refers to a particular taste or approach to the visual qualities of an object.
<b>Avant-garde</b>	This French phrase meaning “advanced guard” is used in English to describe a group that is innovative and experimental in its technique or beliefs, particularly in relation to culture, politics, and the arts.
<b>Medium</b>	Refers to the different materials or supplies that an artists uses to create a work of art. In photography, this can refer to the type of film or process being used, as well as the choice of paper that the image is printed on.
<b>Performance Art</b>	A term that emerged in the 1960s to describe a diverse range of live presentations by artists, including actions, movements, gestures, and choreography. Performance art is often preceded by, includes, or is later represented through various other art forms, including video and photography.
<b>Psychological</b>	Relating to the human mind, thoughts and feelings.
<b>Suspense</b>	A state of mental uncertainty or excitement, as in waiting for a decision or outcome, usually accompanied by a feeling of apprehension or anxiety.
<b>Transformation</b>	A complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved.

# Reading List

Butler, Connie et al. 2021. *Witch Hunt*. DelMonico Books/Hammer Museum

De Bellis, Vincenzo et al. 2020. *The Paradox of Stillness: Art, Object, and Performance*. Walker Art Center.

Baker, Simon and Moran, Fiontán. 2016. *Performing for the Camera*. Tate Publishing

Durant, Mark. 'Photography and Performance' in *Aperture* No. 199, Summer 2010.

Campany, David ed. 2007. *The Cinematic*. Whitechapel Gallery / MIT Press

Export, Valie et al. 2002. *Double Life: Identity and Transformation in Contemporary Art*. Walther Konig, Koln.

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This guide serves as an education supplement to our exhibitions and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion as well as room for student responses. To schedule a tour of this exhibition for students, go to: [silvereye.org](http://silvereye.org)

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