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TERENCE DICK
 MATERIAL SELF & IN CHARACTER AT MOCCA | MONICA TAP AT MKG127
 May 20, 2014

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As the flagship exhibition in the 2014 **Contact Photography Festival**, *Material Self: Performing the Other Within* at the **Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art** combines two recent (as in the last half century) strands of photographic art. The first – and one the festival has dealt with before in this forum – is the documentary aspect of camera work: capturing on film the real of the world as it happens. The second is the studio tradition whereby an image is constructed à la theatre or film. The inescapable figure who rules – though she didn't invent – this trajectory is **Cindy Sherman**. One of her scary clown portraits (as well as a tribute to her by **Yasumasa Morimura**) is included in a parallel exhibition titled *In Character: Self-Portrait of the Artist as Another* drawn from the collection of the National Gallery. Together the two present a handy argument for the self – at least represented through art and, to varying degrees, occurring in everyday life – as a fabrication. All the world, as they say, is a stage.



Meryl McMaster, *Wind Play*, 2012

One trick, among many, that Sherman has managed is not to make her portraits self-portraits despite the fact they almost always feature her self. Other than **Charles Fréger's** striking portraits of nightmarishly costumed "wild men" from a variety of cultural heritages that all seem to hone in on the uncanny thrill of making the animalistic human (and thus celebrate the brute within each of us), most of the artists appear as themselves or through a stand-in. The "other" they perform is one they find within and this conflict is depicted in their work. **David Favrod** explores

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his combined Japanese and Swiss heritage through a cluster of images that don't always work in their heavy-handedness. **Meryl McMaster** does a better job with a series of stills from performances that are clearly rooted in her First Nations background, but alter the expected tropes through gestures that are best described as artistic; art becomes the place exorcise her other. **Namsa Leuba** throws down a slew of conflicting referents from fashion photography to National Geographic while challenging any preconceptions of authenticity. And then **Dominique Rey** takes us back to the alien inside by sculpting her body with masses of cotton and pantyhose. Her best works – and this goes for everyone in both shows – are those where the artist disappears in limits of the familiar.



Monica Tap, *Paseo I*, 2014, oil on canvas

Despite being a painter in the most unambiguous sense of the vocation, **Monica Tap** is not completely unconnected to photography. Her recent work has been based on stills grabbed from video footage shot from moving vehicles. She captures the full spectrum of nature in the rush of a glimpse from the highway. This current exhibition at **MKG127** centres on a suite of monochrome paintings that aren't in motion and look like they've had the colour drained out of them through an option on Photoshop. In the absence of her characteristic palette of greens and other less likely colours (a couple examples of which are in the front room), the noise (which is definitely not a bad thing) of her work is foregrounded and it takes a lot of maneuvering to see what she's painted. Even straight on and from a distance, it's hard to make out the layers of shadow in her overgrown grove. I found I saw things at an angle that I didn't see directly, and then all objectivity disappeared in the skillfully dense calligraphic abstractions when I got close up. At first I thought it was a memorial to trees killed in the ice storm, but it happens to be based on photographs taken from a walking path in Spain. In contrast to the artists at the MOCCA, there is nothing here but an invitation to relinquish the self and not find oneself in the mirror but lose the ego in something far greater – the universe. This art isn't theatre; it's metaphysics.

Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art: <https://www.mocca.ca/>

Material Self: Performing the Other Within continues until June 1.

In Character: Self-Portrait of the Artist as Another Continues until June 1.

MKG127: <http://www.mkg127.com/>

Monica Tap continues until May 31.

Terence Dick is a freelance writer living in Toronto. His art criticism has appeared in Canadian Art, BorderCrossings, Prefix Photo, Camera Austria, Fuse, Mix, C Magazine, Azure, and The Globe and Mail. He is the editor of Akimblog. You can follow his quickie reviews and art news announcements on Twitter [@TerenceDick](https://twitter.com/TerenceDick).

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