

RAG

Richmond Art Gallery
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MEDIA RELEASE

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Barbara McGill Balfour, *Happy in Traction*, 2004
custom made action figure mounted on a stainless steel stand traction bed.

Selfish

Curator: Carolyn Bell Farrell

Organized and Circulated by The Koffler Gallery, Toronto

Selfish brings together semi-autobiographical works by Toronto-based artist Barbara McGill Balfour, produced over a seven year period. In this collection of diverse “self-portraits”, the artist humorously reflects upon the enigma of identity.

Exploring the formative influences of popular culture on identity, Balfour has generated life-sized digital images of herself in the guise of her favourite television characters. *Barbara As Emma* (Emma Peel) and *Barbara As Buffy* (Buffy the Vampire Slayer) convey the artist’s fascination and identification with these invincible heroines, and their impact as female role models. Similarly, in *Tenure Track Barbara* and *Happy in Traction*, she exteriorizes herself by creating action figures in her own likeness. Alluding to the ubiquitous Barbie doll and her innumerable fashion ensembles, Balfour’s adaptations and attendant attire capture both her private self inhabiting a world of pain and healing, as well as her public, academic persona.

The notion of reproducibility informs many of the works on view, referencing Balfour’s primary orientation as a print-based artist. In *Persistence*, she continues her investigation into the ontological history of Silly Putty—a pursuit evident in her 2001 exhibition, *Offspring*, at Open Studio. Employing this amorphous children’s toy, she renders her own image in the form of a glow-in-the-dark life mask. In another project, the artist’s fingerprints infiltrate the gallery space. Evidence of labour, these errant traces are read as distinctive markers. Balfour’s use of rubber stamps in this installation, however, subverts the incontrovertible uniqueness of this icon of individuality.

Balfour’s engagement with self-portraiture extends to other projects such as *100 Things That Make Me Happy*, a collection of works on paper that illuminates her flawed quest for contentment. While encompassing a necessarily impossible list, it none-the-less offers an accurate, if transitory, self-description. Success as a measure of self-identify often arises in the wake of failure. Seventeen crumpled balls of paper, cast in bronze, compose *Plan B*, materializing the unacknowledged, yet cumulative burden of discarded ideas.

Given the varied approaches to autobiographic representation in *Selfish*, Balfour, ultimately, points to the impossibility of defining what constitutes a stable sense of self. Identity is always in flux: a work in progress.

Text by Carolyn Bell Farrell

Selfish was originally presented at The Koffler Gallery/ Koffler Centre of the Arts in Toronto from March 3 to April 22, 2005. The RAG's presentation of the exhibition will include a 32-page colour catalogue, co-produced by the Richmond Art Gallery and The Koffler Gallery with a feature essay by Dr. Jennifer Fisher. The price for the catalogue is \$10.00.

Barbara McGill Balfour was raised in Montreal and received a B.A. in French Literature from Smith College in Massachusetts, an A.O.C.A. from the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, and a M.F.A. from Concordia University in Montreal. She taught print media and feminist art and theory at Concordia University before assuming the position of Head of the Print Media Area, Department of Visual Arts at York University in 1999. She has exhibited across Canada and the United States since 1988.

Carolyn Bell Farrell is the Senior Curator of The Koffler Gallery in Toronto, where she has been responsible for the contemporary program since 1994. She is currently a member of the City of Toronto's "Art Committee for Public Places," responsible for public art on public land in the Greater Toronto Area, as well as an Adjunct Professor at York University, Department of Visual Arts.

The **opening reception** is on Sunday, **January 14 from 2:00 to 4:00pm**. The artist will be in attendance and the catalogue will be available for purchase. **Barbara McGill Balfour** will conduct a brief tour of the exhibition, *Selfish* on Sunday, January 14 at 2:00pm. Call **Nan Capogna** for more information at 604.231.6425

The Richmond Art Gallery is located at 180-7700 Minoru Gate in Richmond. For more information or to obtain images, please contact us at 604.231.6457 ext 608 or 604.231.6454. **Gallery hours are 10:00am to 6:00pm from Monday to Friday and 10:00 am to 5:00 pm on Saturday and Sunday**. For more information visit our website at www.richmondartgallery.org.

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