

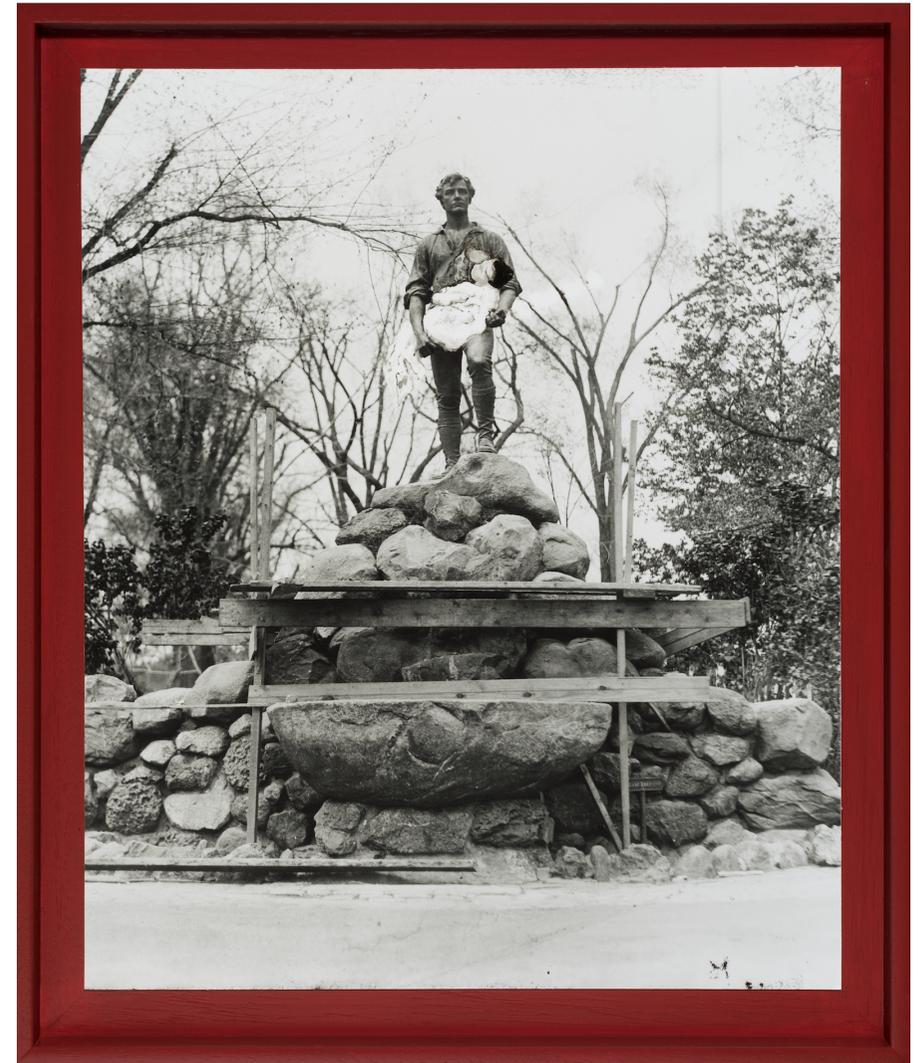
tangible measure...”. Waring took the word *value* back to its Latin origins -- *valere*, to be strong or worthy.

Kate Davis, now a mother herself, reviews and reconciles the vulnerability, the strength – vivifying the personal, with all its value. As I reflect back on her use of bricks throughout the installation, the brick can be seen as of fundamental value. Foundations are built, brick by brick. Metaphorically, the excerpts, references, extracts, snippets of recorded everyday experiences are the bricks through (from) which she builds a premise, a dwelling – a place in the world. Her generous artistic process forges relationships with/for women – past and present, anonymous and recognized. It is this approach to re-positioning that unleashes potential and preserves something essential.

Lauren Dyer Amazeen

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Lauren Dyer Amazeen writes regularly for *Artforum*, and has written for *Tema Celeste* contemporary art magazine (Milan), *Crawford fashion magazine* (Athens), *Paletten* contemporary Swedish arts journal and *ArtReview*. She is a member of the Association of International Art Critics (AICA). Lauren was Director of The Kitchen, the international center for video, music, performance, dance, literature and film in New York City, during the 1990s. During the 1980s she worked closely with the founders of ZKM (center for art and media technology) in Karlsruhe, Germany to design a model for bringing artists and technologies together. She curated the inaugural video exhibition *Soul Search* for the ZKM Multimediale 1 in 1989 and served as a consultant for the initial purchases of the ZKM's video art collection. She currently serves as Chair of CCA Glasgow.



Kate Davis: *Nudes Never Wear Glasses*
Stills, Edinburgh, 28 July - 8 Oct 2017

Nudes Never Wear Glasses

We use our particulars to challenge the universal.

– Sara Ahmed

Sara Ahmed writes in her recent book *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), ‘Where there is hope, there is difficulty’. In order to move forward, we can neither forget the feminist past nor believe that we are well beyond it. Ahmed speaks of continually reviewing what came before, as a way of pausing, not rushing ahead – keeping histories and a consciousness in front of us (in both senses of the phrase), not behind us. Addressing the barriers, the walls that have denied access, speaking about them – personally and institutionally. Being sensible. As I read Ahmed’s words, I naturally began to reflect on Kate Davis’ artistic practice – her reaching back to the past, re-searching, re-considering, and in her gentle yet iconoclastic way -- re-constructing, re-presenting the past with a feminist logic, thoughtfully crafting a re-view, another perspective. Davis persists in staying present, concentrating, connecting with her experiences, responding to the here and now. What Sara Ahmed calls ‘staying close to the everyday.’

Davis’ exhibition at Stills, *Nudes Never Wear Glasses*, is formed as an installation, with three brick walls constructed to be an integral element of the overall presentation – both conceptually and practically. She has selected some previously shown artworks, as well as created three new photographic works, and her Margaret Tait Award commission, *Charity* (2017), which recently premiered in a film theatre, will be seen for the first time in an art exhibition context.

Entering the exhibition, one is confronted with a brick wall, perceived as a possible physical impediment; here, to be negotiated with, to move around in order to proceed. Placed on this wall is a new work titled *Brick Wall I* — a photograph of a classical female nude studio sculpture. Experimenting with and expanding upon the photographic medium, Davis has taken an old glass plate negative and scratched into the emulsion to inscribe a pair of eye glasses into the image. The printed image portrays a nude woman wearing glasses, which, are obviously hand drawn by the artist – wittily affording the

anonymous female figure some emotion and intelligence. Her new spectacles symbolically infer an intellect, and release her from idealisation – with her less than perfect eyesight. These ‘raggedy lines’ echo the marks on the old glass plate negative, to use, as Davis says ‘the same vocabulary as those made naturally over time.’

On the opposite side of this wall, is *Brick Wall II* – a photo of a monument statue of a Minuteman (American Revolution militia). Using an old glass plate negative, and this time exposing painted alterations with the glass plate, as well as painting on the final print, the original image has been altered to look as if the male figure is breastfeeding a baby. The statue now commemorates the male for his nurturing. A role reversal. By altering gender, Davis opens up questions about its representation throughout art history, and asks what else the male body could represent.

Charity (2017) is a thoughtful, witty, filmic essay on the subject of women breastfeeding told through a captivating, comprehensive variety of art historical still imagery – including early images of the iconic genres of *Madonna Lactus* – Madonna breastfeeding the baby Christ, and *Roman Charity* – an exemplary story of a woman who saves the life of her incarcerated, starving parent through breastfeeding. (Both are archetypes of universal love and caring.) The still images are interlaced with several close up moving images of the artist undertaking household tasks, animating the everyday. A narration recited by Gerda Stevenson of extracts adapted from notable writings of Margaret Tait, Adrienne Rich, Susan Griffin, Mary Chamberlain, Justin Patyka and D.W. Winnicott, underpins the visuals. Davis has envisaged the narration in the spirit of Greta (a character played by Gerda Stevenson) in Margaret Tait’s exceptional feature film *Blue Black Permanent*.

Davis’ film juxtaposes the personal ups and downs, sensations and feelings in caring for a child recounted by the narrator with the ideal of motherhood and unconditional love portrayed in the art historical imagery. In an interesting cerebral twist, the narrator proposes there is economic value in the work of a mother keeping a baby fed, and details the ritual of breastfeeding as one would a job description. This parallels the thinking of the feminist economist Marilyn Waring who challenged the standards of what is called work, what is economically valuable in her book *If Women Counted: New Feminist Economics* (1988). Waring writes that “Value is a sense, a feeling – not a