

# CENTRAL FINE

## JEN DENIKE. THE PODS.

### MAY 28<sup>TH</sup> - JUNE 25<sup>TH</sup> 2023

CENTRAL FINE is pleased to announce Jen DeNike's upcoming solo exhibition, *The Pods*. The presentation comprises seven photographic works accompanied by a sculptural video installation, anchored by a seminal early video work from 2003, creating a palimpsest of the past, present, and future.

DeNike's practice investigates the gendered politics of the body through the lens of contemporary feminist temporalities. A phenomenological approach is foregrounded through an examination of the corporeality of the filmic body and how it moves through space, translating its anachronistic durational continuity to the virtual memory of the body through art historical time. The linguistic materiality of movement as a form of sculptural choreography regardless of the medium is always present.

Building on her pods, a series of suspended male figures in regrowth presented last year at CENTRAL FINE, DeNike's new meticulously rendered pigment prints mediate a trenchant reframing of John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851-52). Blurring the lines between painting and photography her deeply saturated colors and attention to detail are copacetic to the Pre-Raphaelites' obsessive manipulation of painted surfaces in depicting the realism of nature. In revoking the historically known female Ophelia, she shifts her gaze onto the male Ophelia, while simultaneously burying him beneath heaping flowers that migrate and converge into earth and crystals. Eventually, *he* is eclipsed by the materiality of nature, an ambiguous Ophelia, thus erasing, rather than tracing its histories. The works don't recapitulate representations of the body, but instead, create a conceptual construction of new bodies through the kinesthetic capacities and articulation of visually repeating enunciations of gesture and form. DeNike initiates a series of compositional enactments – accumulating into corporeal sedimentation that moves through and with the performers.

In *It isn't just a matter of gravitational weight*,<sup>1</sup> an orthogonal perspective and dramatically foreshortened body delineates a torso pushed to the edge of the frame, his cropped legs, imply a vertical entrance rather than a view, flanked by four works that initiate a distillation of the body as repeating horizon lines. The work's titles are extracted from a recorded lecture by Scottish psychiatrist and writer R.D. Laing where he discusses and questions the existential realities of the body in relationship to the process of presence and illusion. Continuing, in order of appearance, the titles elicit a call and response: *How does your head look to your eyes, Well I tell you, it looks like what you see out in front of you, Because all that you see out in front of you, is how you feel inside your head, The difficulty is to walk without touching the ground.* Laing's further use of the term "transcendental" in reference to experience, doesn't mean in the philosophical sense of a condition of possibility for experience, but as something beyond, something transcendent.<sup>2</sup>

Walking through red curtains into the gallery back-room, *Death of a Brother* (2003) looms large as a video projection – revealing two young men – actual brothers – who perform an ancient Viking ritual, a protocol dictating that siblings must be buried head to head, in order not to mistake each other in the afterlife as lovers. Filmed on location in Louisiana, DeNike discovered the overgrown and forgotten camellia orchard nestled within former public gardens, originally cultivated by two eccentric brothers who grafted flowers in (1929). Subsequently, she has returned year after year to the site, amassing a significant collection of video and photographic works created from 2003 to 2023. *Death of A Brother* was first shown at AIM 24 curated by Lydia Yee and Amy Rosenblum, Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2004). Notably, two of the photographs on view were captured in the artesian spring that runs alongside the grove in *Death of a Brother*. Two decades later, DeNike picked flowers from the very same trees, to place on the performers, binding a provenance of place, and her fascination with the cyclical nature of time.

*Weightless Memory* (2023) a sculptural video installation, includes hundreds of quartz crystals hand mined by Jen in Arkansas. The artist has been mining crystals as part of her practice since 2010, upon returning to her studio, she collectively washes, catalogs, and orders the crystals repeatedly on tables; a performative act that culminates and connects the crystals as both geological specimens and metaphysical entities that later become part of her work. *Weightless Memory* translates a visual experience into a virtual memory, appropriating DeNike's personal crystal ritual to form an intervention of the exterior into the interior, the real into the projected, and the site into the non-site<sup>3</sup>. The viewer must lean over a weighted shelf full of crystals, to peer through a peephole, hence espousing an intimacy and physical contact with the crystals. Jen's cinematic perspective leads us to hover, fly, and float, as we ascend and descend a staircase lined with mounting crystals, row after row, stair after stair, her spiraling Penrose steps lead to the intimate discovery of a body – splayed out like the female figure of Duchamp's *Étant donnés* (1946–66). Through consecutive layers of mirroring, her crystal act repeats, while the camera seems to both caress the body and simultaneously elicit chaos; the

<sup>1</sup> DeNike, Jen. *It isn't just a matter of gravitational weight*, pigment print on watercolor paper, 20 x 24 inches, 2023, unique.

<sup>2</sup> Laing, R. D. 1960/2010. *The Divided Self. An Existential Study in Madness and Sanity*. London: Penguin Books.

<sup>3</sup> Smithson, Robert. "A Provisional Theory of Nonsites." In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Jack Flam. University of California Press, 1996.

wind blows, and flowers and stems are disturbed, meanwhile, the crystals appear to have gathered closer relocating near the body, no longer in organized lines the crystals scatter now across the steps like distant stars into chaos, unscripted the narrative continues until the body is seemingly consumed by crystals, or becomes one, spinning into the ether, disappearing, no longer tethered to gravity.

Sally Ride, the first female astronaut, told Gloria Steinman in an interview directly following her mission (1983), "Weightlessness is a great equalizer".

Jen DeNike lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. This is her second solo presentation at CENTRAL FINE. She holds a MFA from Bard College where she also completed a Master Class with Stephen Shore, and is a PhD researcher at Glasgow School of Art. *Bird in Space Becoming Dancer* (2019) a sculptural video installation made of crystals was included in *Crystals In Art*, a comprehensive exhibition featuring contemporary artists working with crystals alongside objects from antiquity, curated by Lauren Haynes and Joachim Pissarro at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art with accompanying catalog. Jen's work was included as a solo presentation in a year-long series of video artists at DOCK 20 Modern Art Museum Kunstraum and Sammlung Hollensten, Lustenau, Austria (March 2023). Jen DeNike in collaboration with Barbara Gundlach has been awarded an artist in residence at Monom Berlin (summer 2023) the artists will be working collaboratively to compose a 4D performance sound opera focused on merging performance and spatial sound.

Jen DeNike has exhibited internationally a select list of exhibitions includes: JEN and 9 Ballet, (with Rainer Krensetter & Miami City Ballet), CENTRAL FINE, Miami, Florida (2022), *The Ulterior Narrative Cinema*, Tick Tack Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium (2022), *Black Swan: The Communes - KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin* (2021), *Visions in Light: Windows on the Wallis*, Wallis Annenberg Center For the Performing Arts, LA, CA (2020), *Some people*, Fotografie da Von Gloeden a Warhol, from the Collection of Ernesto Esposito, MEF Museo Ettore Fico, Torino, Italy (2019), *Queen of Narwhals*, Faena Forum, Miami, Florida. (2018), *Generation Loss: 10 Year Julia Stoschek Collection*, Düsseldorf, Germany (2017), *Number Twelve: Hello Boys*, Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf, Germany (2016), *The Gender Show*, Eastman Kodak House, Rochester (2013), MoMA Media Lounge, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York (2012), *Scrying*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York (2010), *She Devil 5*, MACRO Museo D'Arte Contemporanea, Rome, Italy (2011), *Reflections on The Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video*, curated by Lauren Ross, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (2009), *Dunking and Wrestling: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York* (2008), *A Starting Point: Intrude 366—Dynamics of Change and Growth*, curated by Biljana Ciric, Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, China (2009), *Fragile*, Julia Stoschek Collection, Dusseldorf, Germany (2008), *That Was Then, This Is Now*, PS1/MoMA, Long Island City, New York (2008), *Under the Influence*, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard, Annandale-on- Hudson, New York (2008), *Jen DeNike*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2006), *PS1 / MoMA*, Long Island City, New York (2005), *Boys Behaving Badly*, curated by Valerie Cassel, Houston Museum of Contemporary Art, Texas (2004).



Jen DeNike

*It isn't just a matter of gravitational weight*

Pigment print on watercolor paper with custom artist frame

20 x 26 inches

2023



Jen DeNike

*How does your head look to your eyes*

Pigment print on watercolor paper with custom artist frame

20 x 26 inches

2023



Jen DeNike

*Well I tell you, it looks like what you see out in front of you*

Pigment print on watercolor paper with custom artist frame

20 x 26 inches

2023



Jen DeNike

*Because all that you see out in front of you, is how you feel inside your head*

Pigment print on watercolor paper with custom artist frame

20 x 26 inches

2023



Jen DeNike

*The difficulty is to walk without touching the ground*

Pigment print on watercolor paper with custom artist frame

20 x 26 inches

2023



Jen DeNike

*When there is nobody left to whom the body can be a burden it is no longer a burden*

Pigment print on watercolor paper with custom artist frame

20 x 26 inches

2023





Jen DeNike

*Crystal memory (remembered)*

Pigment print on watercolor paper with custom artist frame

26 x 20 inches

2023



Jen DeNike

*Weightless memory*

Sculptural Video installation Quartz crystals hand mined by the artist on custom shelf single channel  
video, color no sound, TRT: 2:02 minutes, loops continuously

2023



Jen DeNike

*Death of a Brother*

Single channel video, color and sound, TRT: 9 minutes, projection loops continuously  
2003