

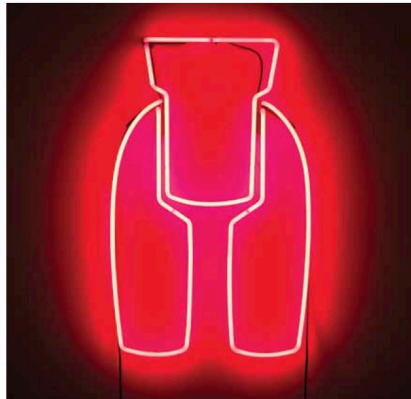
# ALLIE POHL

## The Excellent People: Winter 2014-15

### Allie Pohl: The Ideal Woman

# IDEP

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## ALLIE POHL: THE IDEAL WOMAN

by Ricky Lee

**Ricky Lee:** Tell me about the *Ideal Woman* project and how the idea for it came about.

Allie Pohl: I have always been interested in why we follow certain cultural trends. For example, the concept of body hair and hair removal: we remove hair from certain parts of our body and add it to others. As a way to respond to this cultural phenomenon, I created a series of sculptures using a "My Size Barbie" (the doll) as a metaphor for the "ideal woman," and I had Chia grow out of areas where our society removes unwanted hair, i.e. the armpit, vagina, and legs. The sculptures transformed from prepubescent to womanhood during the time of the installation. I was captivated by the shape of the midsection and started to explore different ways to appropriate the shape and what it really represented.

**RL:** What is your working process?

AP: I become fixated on a cultural phenomenon, read extensively on that subject matter, talk to anyone who will talk to me about it, formulate what I want to say, and then start thinking about the best way to visually express my thoughts.

**RL:** What are some of your other work series / projects?

AP: Two series I have been working on for over two years are *Hot Seat* and *Heel* videos. *Hot Seat* is a series of self-portraits taken in restroom stalls of places you go to "see and be seen" in Los Angeles. These photographs provide the viewer an intimate glimpse into one of our simplest and most personal bodily functions, in reference to the over-documentation of life on social media.

In the *Heel* videos, I strap a camera to the back of a high heel, giving the viewer an eye-level perspective of the back end of a Gucci heeled shoe. The focus of this work is the high-heel shoe—a glamorous accessory emblematic of power, seduction, femininity, and female authority, worn by many at both the office and the red carpet. By removing the high-heel from these environments and placing it on a hiking path, at the beach, or at the gym, I closely scrutinize the anguish involved with wearing such shoes. The resulting footage portrays the action as not only sadistic, but also absurd. Beauty should not equal pain.

**RL:** How would you describe your aesthetic?

AP: My work uses the principles of abstraction and is intentionally graphic and polished.

**RL:** What's your background?

AP: I went to Hamilton College and was a Studio Art minor and Communications major. I wrote my thesis on the rhetoric and the trajectory of the peace symbol. I then went on to study graphic design at Parsons, The New School for Design, before receiving my MFA from the University of Denver in Electronic Media Arts.

**RL:** Why are we fascinated by Barbie, and how does this fascination inform your work?

AP: "Barbie" is an American cultural icon, born in 1959 (derivative of the Lilli doll),

at the dawn of Post-War consumer culture. While originally intended as a toy for young girls, its ubiquitous presence resulted in a brand that has come to represent the ideal of female physical perfection. Although she has become more diverse and ambitious over the years, her physical shape has not really changed. She is an unnatural, unrealistic portrayal of beauty.

On a more general level, Barbie is a perfect example of how contemporary society's standard of beauty is largely determined by our consumer culture. We are inundated with images that "define" feminine beauty, but the reality is that most of these images (or individuals) are produced with the help of technology—altering the representation of reality. Improvements in communication technology have also allowed these images to be shared more quickly and frequently, which exacerbates their impact.

**RL:** You've also been working in a series called *Peacocking*. Please describe.

AP: Inspired by online dating, particularly the ever-so-popular Tinder, I chose to explore how men market themselves to women. From my research (online and in person), I created man merit-badges (based on the traditional boy-scout badges) of the qualities men most commonly try to convey.

I also made sculptures of dissected mannequin parts from different decades (finished in the most popular car color of the corresponding decade) to show how the idealized form has changed and to highlight how contemporary men are also subject to society's notions of perfection.

Given the change in cultural trends, this is not surprising. Gay culture has become more accepted—both socially and politically—men are getting married later in life, resulting in them spending more money on themselves. You open up *GQ* today, and you might as well be reading *Cosmo*; there's everything from designer clothing to shaving products.

**RL:** What's ahead for you?

AP: An installation of life-size *Ideal Women* with pet-able muffs at SCOPE Miami during Art Basel Miami Beach, followed by selections from my *Hot Seat* and *Bathroom* series and an *Ideal Woman* jewelry pop-up shop in *The Photography Show* in NYC produced by AKArt Advisory and The Committee December 11-20, and a solo show at Galerie 102 in California in 2015.

**RL:** What is perfection?

AP: It does not exist!

alliepohl.com

This Page: *Ideal Woman*, 3ft Neon Red  
Right Top: *Hot Seat*, Gagosian Gallery  
Right Bottom: *Hot Seat*, Jumbos Clown Room

the EXCELLENT PEOPLE



ARTIST ISSUE