

DIAZ CONTEMPORARY

Paulette Phillips

The Directed Lie

16 February - 17 March | Opening Thursday, 16 February 6-8

In *The Directed Lie*, Paulette Phillips uses mechanical drawings, video and sculpture to explore the difference between what we see and what we know. In 2009, Phillips trained as a lie detector in Baltimore, Maryland, where she developed interrogation and lie testing skills. Focused on creating an archive of the art world she inhabits, Phillips conducted 238 interviews in Toronto, Paris, London, Dublin, Montreal, Vancouver, Banff, Venice and New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

In each, the subject is asked to answer 33 questions while attached to a polygraph. The instrument produces mechanical ink drawings that indicate "a knowledge" that resides in the body through the measurement of blood pressure, heart rate, and electricity. With the ink drawings, tiny colored lines of data, Phillips can interpret irregularities in these lines as "responses" – heightened subconscious activity in the subject's body. We get to watch this process, both the activity of the machine and the concentrated, vulnerable face and body of the interviewee, accompanied by the artist's off camera voice.

Lie detection is a complex and nuanced practice, and in this case what is achieved is not exactly a discovery of truth. Without the high stakes involved in the accusation of a crime, the responses measured by the machine are not necessarily distillable into applicable information. The result of the ritual is more of a portrait – a physical expression, through technology, of invisible and unknowable thought and feeling. Moreover, the interview process is one of complicity. The test is not designed so that we can discover hidden truths about the subjects, but rather so that through their cooperation, we can watch them privately lie.

Through this process, we almost conduct more of a test of the machine's abilities to tell the truth, than of the subjects'. By bringing the controversial science of polygraphy into the realm of art, Phillips accesses a conversation about our complicated ideas of truth and judgment, about authority and language, and about the performance of the self.

Paulette Phillips has established an international reputation for her tense, humorous and uncanny explorations of the phenomena of conflicting energies. Working in various media including video, sculpture, performance and photography, she is interested in the contradictions that play out in our construction of stability. Her work questions the implied strength of structures like "human nature", knowledge and architecture and how over time these structures are contested, disappear or get reclaimed by nature.

Phillips' work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Galerie Chomette in Paris, Danielle Arnaud Contemporary Art in London, The Oakville Galleries, Cambridge Galleries, The National College of Art and Design in Dublin, and The Ottawa Art Gallery. Recent group exhibitions include: the Centre d'art contemporain de Basse-Normandie, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the Tate Modern, and Galerie Antje Wachs in Berlin. Phillips teaches film and installation at The Ontario College of Art and Design.