

# BARBARA ESS

## *Someone To Watch Over Me*

April 7–May 12, 2019

Opening Reception: Sunday, April 7, 2019, 6–8pm

Magenta Plains is proud to present *Someone To Watch Over Me*, our first solo exhibition with Barbara Ess. Ess is renowned for her haunting pinhole photographs and for performing in experimental bands in New York City's 1980s and 90s downtown art scene. She is the founder and editor of the legendary mixed-media publication, *Just Another Asshole*, and has exhibited her work in solo and group exhibitions worldwide. *Someone to Watch Over Me* focuses on Ess's recent projects in photography, video, and sound dealing with themes of boundaries, distance and separation.

Ess has long used unconventional methods to underline the subjective nature of experience and representation. Employing lo-fi optical devices and image systems, small telescopes, and a toy microscope, Ess embraces the glitches and unintended artifacts resulting from her processes, seeking to depict the uncertainties of perception and uncover ambiguous perceptual boundaries between the "in-here" and "out-there."

Central to this exhibition are Ess's *Surveillance* and *Remote* photographs. Having signed up as an online "Deputy Sheriff" for an internet surveillance site on the Texas-Mexico border, she accessed a network of low-resolution and heat-sensitive cameras. This live stream program was designed for home computers as a "virtual community watch" to empower the public to monitor suspicious activity, possible drug trafficking, and border crossings. Fascinated by the feeling of being present at the border from such a distance, Ess recorded events witnessed in real time happening thousands of miles away without reporting her observations.

She later began making use of other live feeds available via television and the internet, such as weather, traffic and vacation cameras. These apparatuses continued to allow her the experience of collapsed space and distance between the viewer and the viewed, the watcher and the watched. After discovering a UHF channel broadcasting local pedestrian and traffic activity, Ess spent late nights observing a couple hanging out in Times Square, cars whizzing down Victory Boulevard in Staten Island at sunrise, a yellow taxi waiting for a light to change on Canal Street, and a man stranded on a highway in the midwest, etc.

Her most recent series, *Shut-In*, chronicles an experience of being holed up in her apartment for more than a month while ill with bronchitis. Unable to continue her normal routine, she began photographing details of her daily life such as domestic objects and the changing light on the fire escape outside her window. Ess made small prints, enhanced them with silver, black and white crayons, and then later scanned and enlarged the photographs. Barbara Ess uses mediation in her photography as a means to investigate the relationship of personal experience to the manifest world, foregrounding looking itself, acknowledging the artifacts of representation, and embodying a sense of longing in that gaze.



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received a BA from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan and attended the London School of Film Technique in London. Upon her return to New York City she became involved with music, performance, photography and the creation of artist books. Ess has had numerous solo exhibitions of her work throughout the United States and Europe, including retrospectives at the Queens Museum, NY, the Center for Fine Arts, Miami, FL and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA. Other selected solo exhibitions were held at 3A Gallery, New York, NY; Thierry Goldberg, New York, NY; Incident Report, Hudson, NY; Wallspace, New York, NY; Moore College of Art, Philadelphia PA; Curt Marcus Gallery, New York, NY; Fagionato Fine Arts, London, UK; Frederick Giroux Gallery, Paris, France; Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Stills Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland; Fundacion La Caixa, Barcelona, Spain; Galeria Espanola La Maquina, Madrid, Spain; Interim Art, London, England; Ghilaïne Hussenot, Paris, France and Johnen+Schöttle, Cologne, among others.

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Her photographs have been included in group exhibitions at institutions including the Tang Museum, Sarasota Springs, NY; New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ; Middlebury College Museum of Art, Middlebury, VT; Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona Beach, FL; Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, OH; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK; and National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan. Barbara Ess has been the subject of cover stories in *Artforum* and *Art in America* and a monograph of her work, *I Am Not This Body*, was published by Aperture in 2001. Her work is in numerous permanent collections, including The Art Institute of Chicago, The Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, The Carnegie Museum of Art, The Walker Art Center, Pompidou Center/Musée d'Art Moderne, and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX. Barbara Ess lives and works in New York City. She is an Associate Professor of Photography at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson.

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