



Notions

Melanie Flood

October 3–November 28, 2020

@

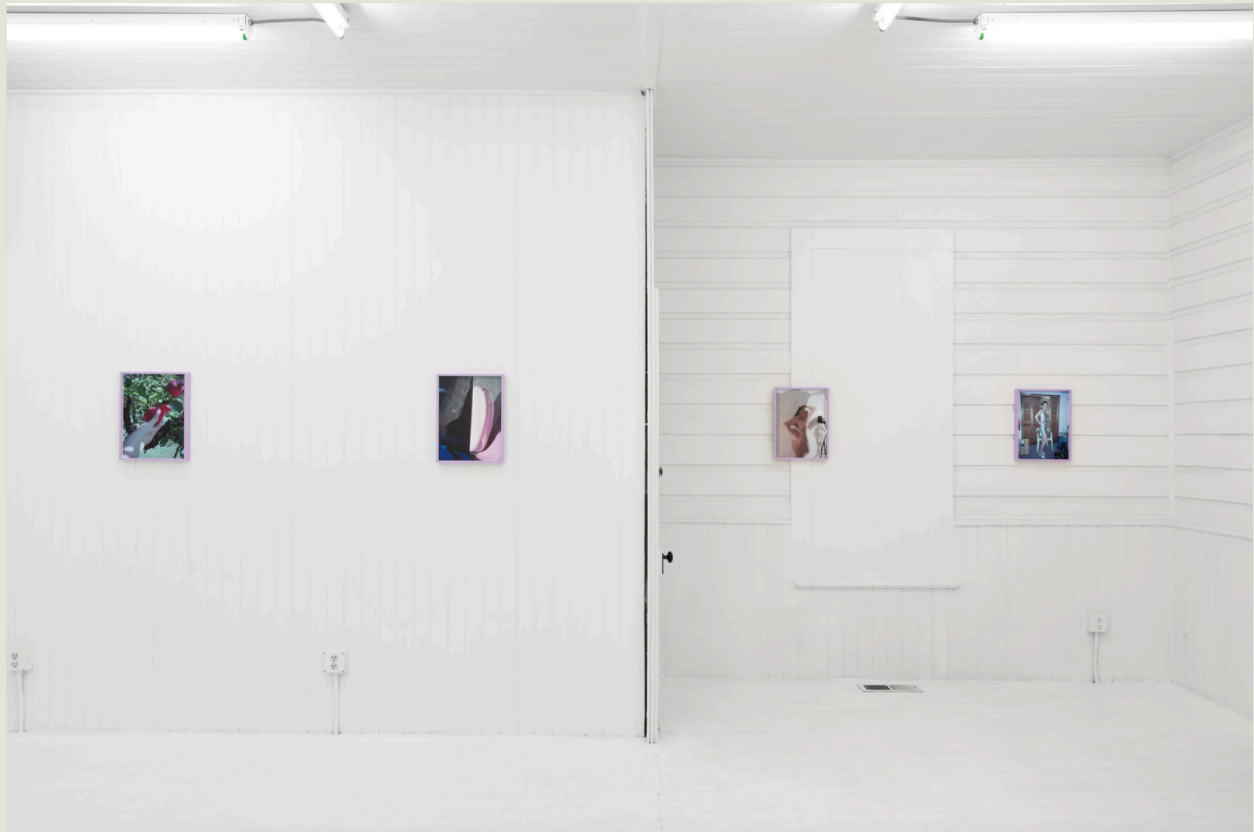
Fourteen30 Contemporary

1501 SW Market Street

Portland, Oregon 97201

By Laurel V. McLaughlin

It was a day shrouded in fog and spitting rain when I walked into Fourteen30 Contemporary in Portland, Oregon. The gray always drudged up feelings, notions even, you could call them.



Installation view of Melanie Flood: *Notions*, October 3–November 28, 2020, Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland, OR, Photography by Area Array.

I walked around Fourteen30 Contemporary's white-painted, wooden-beamed gallery, past each lavender-clad photographic frame, sparingly curated into two rows on either wall. The purple reminded me of the particular shade of "dark berry" that graced my adolescent bedroom—the first I was allowed to select on my own (until I could paint my bedroom a sallow green in high school, another questionable choice)—that plunged my back-of-house-"suburban sanctuary" into perpetual gloom and curiously matched the current fleshly envelopment of Portland. The installation was also pointedly '90s but not in a cloying, commodified sense. Instead, there was a sentimentality both seemingly carefree but deeply tinged with care. Flood's pairing of archival pigment prints, many of which are self-portraits, and more recent constructed still lifes in *Notions* set-up echoing conversations between past, present, and future that self-reflexively reference *the body* and "womanhood." Many contemporary artists and scholars cringe at the presumptive generalization of "the body" and the exclusiveness of "womanhood"—and for good reason—so Flood's photographs quietly rend them apart.



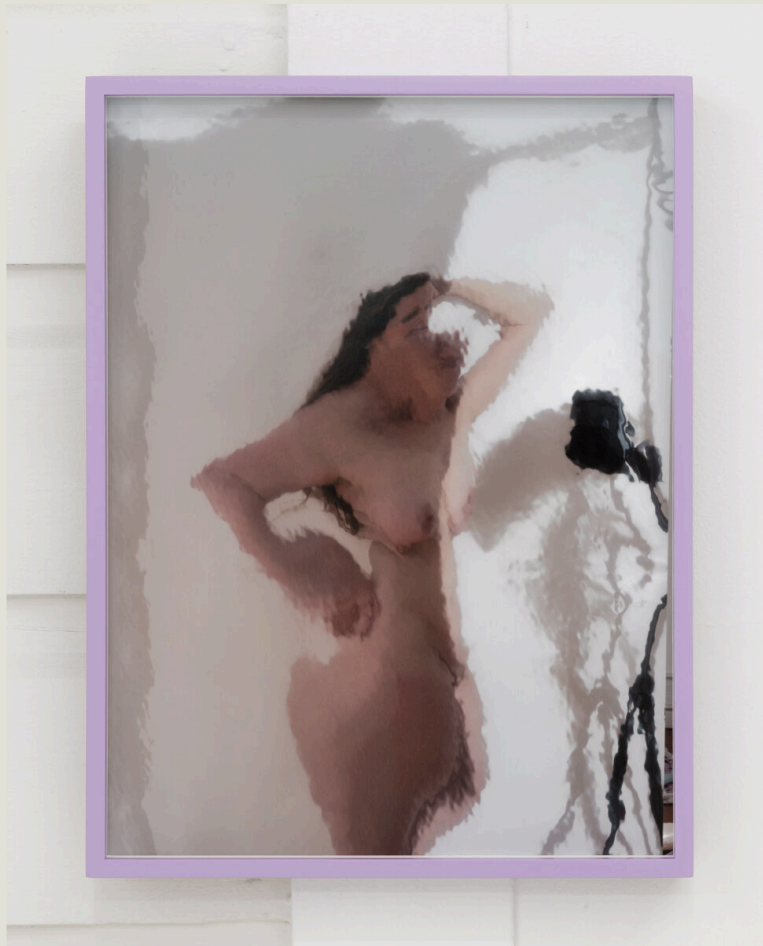
Melanie Flood, *Notions I*, 2020. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Area Array.



Melanie Flood, *Notions 3*, 2020. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Area Array.

Melanie Flood, *Notions 3*, 2020. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Area Array.

Notions 1 (2020) reeks of nostalgia, but not the simple kind. Gleamingly manicured nails reach around a door to place a hanging privacy sign reading “How To Get More Privacy” in a torn-out sheet from a three-ring binder labeled at the top as “Friends and Family.” The sheet perches on a soft velvet cover in a staged studio environment with tinsel in the background. Flood reminisces in such constructed still lifes both fondly and incredulously on the teen binders distributed in the ‘90s—they offered as much “advice” as they captured wrenching anxiety. *Expectations* about being lurked in the crevices of the stilled objects, slowly taking on flesh via memory and presumption. I recalled posting a sign-up sheet torn from a like magazine on my teenage door, demanding privacy. On a different affective note, *Notions 3* (2020) sucker-punched me softly with an anxiety I could not yet recollect. A pink pillow, designed for women to ward off wrinkles between their breasts during sleep, partially lies shadowed by dark mylar against another sparkling backdrop, with blue and pink velvet swaths from Flood’s vast textile archive bisecting the foreground. This notion projected a corporeal contention with age with which I had only just begun to wrestle. But it struck me nonetheless as yet another *notion* awaiting me.



Melanie Flood, *Camera (self-portrait)*, 2020. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Area Array.



Melanie. Flood, *Silver dress (self-portrait)*, 1994/2020. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Area Array.

Melanie Flood, *Silver dress (self-portrait)*, 1994/2020. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Area Array.

The disconnections between my adolescence, present state, and what I will inevitably become felt acute. *Camera (self-portrait)* (2020) and *Silver dress (self-portrait)* (1994/2020) render Flood in various states of self-awareness as well. The first, in a reflective surface-blurred standing-posture, Flood shoots herself, as is the case with all of her self-portraits. She is fully cognizant of the creeping changes that compound into age, which the blur expands and over-exaggerates. In the second, a 1994 Flood poses with her hand on her hip, centered in the frame and bedecked in silver Lycra and gleaming white patent-leather heels. She returns the camera's central shot with a hard stare. I remember that stance. Recycled, a ready-made. The consciousness of self here is fully—and perhaps only—about the self. It is a notion constructed from the internal fear of what the external world expects. And that expectation always fluctuates, demands more, criticizes more harshly.



Melanie Flood, *Notions 2*, 2020. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Area Array.



Melanie Flood, *Fan (self-portrait)*, 2020. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Area Array.

Notions 2 seemed more distant, like the harshness of expectations—a guise of retro sex appeal as if composed from later in life, or for later in life. Hot pink frills dripped down alongside a rhinestone zipper, circling towards a reflective surface and flanked by slick jewelry boxes. A vanity mirror without the vanity. This material arrangement made me simultaneously feel all the ache of my twenties—the performances of serial dating—and at the same time, made me anxious for old age, when perhaps that misguided desire will be lost. *Fan (self-portrait)* (2020) seemed to fill the gaping anxieties that the former portrait pairing and *Notions 3* evoked. Flood, seemingly in a bathroom is covered by a floral curtain, but unveiled from the waist down. Donning a fan, she melds into the blurred mirror's heated droplets except for a tightened fist that remains perfectly in focus. The hazy illusion is actually a mylar manipulation, demonstrating the deft restraint and confidence of Flood's new work. It was looking at this self-portrait that I realized how, despite shifting contingent conversations amongst Flood in the self-portraits (and certainly within myself), the still lifes in their constructed environments bodied forth affective anchor points. Each projected waves of the painfully present, yet clouded self-nostalgia, disgust, and, dare I say, admiration that affectively threaten to overwhelm those embarking on the path of so-called "womanhood," presenting these intangible wisps back to you as more-than fleshly mirror images asking: why?



[Melanie Flood, *Girls (self-portrait)*, (1996/2000). Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 in. Edition of 2/1 AP. Courtesy of Fourteen30 Contemporary. Photography by Mario Gallucci.]

For some reason, the last image I saw in the show was *Girls (self-portrait)*, (1996/2000). It had been in the corner of my eye, but I had skipped it (or maybe avoided it) until the end. A young Flood sits on the steps of a Catholic school. Emblazoned letters spelling “GIRLS” rest atop Ionic columns. A blue oversized sweatshirt, bell bottoms, and black platforms all threaten to swallow Flood’s respective limbs. Waist-length hair cradles her awkwardly. Her frame leans forward. Her eyes blink. Maybe the GIRLS sign bears down upon her; maybe she crumples on purpose. Full of notions, much like those with which I entered the gallery, she’s both young and old, caught between should bes and could’ve beens. Looking at this person who was everything I felt, I wondered if escaping her wasn’t the end game, but, instead, taking a good hard stare.