

SAGE SZKABARNICKI-STUART

WONDER

Sage Szkabarnicki-Stuart is an artist living in rural Ontario with her husband, three dogs and a family of goats. Working in staged photography and video, her practice intersects early cinema, vaudeville and slapstick comedy, advertising, social media, performance, and contemporary art. Sage is particularly inspired by the late-19th - early 20th Century, 'cinema of attractions' movement—short-form, non-narrative films characterized by amusing stunts, optical illusions, and low-budget special effects. Characteristically, the actors looked directly into the camera, prioritizing audience engagement over storytelling.

Sage is equally inspired by physical acts performed by artist Chris Burden in his early videos, such as *Shoot* (1971) and *Trans-Fixed* (1974), as well as by Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980), disguised self-portraits exploring mutable identities. Similarly, Szkabarnicki-Stuart performs acts for the camera in resourcefully self-made, low-tech sets that elicit direct audience response through humour, absurdity, endearing or bizarre behaviour. While provoking a sense of amusement and wonder, these acts are not solely intended as self-portraits or site-gags. The images reflect

charged moments influenced by her personal history and her surroundings.

WONDER features a selection of photographs and videos produced over the last eight years. In addition, Sage extends her practice by transforming Koffler Arts' new gallery and performance space, a former classroom and office space on the third floor at Youngplace, into a site-responsive architectural environment of visual play and theatricality. Appropriating vocabularies of advertising and commercial photography, she includes homemade billboards, glossy photographs printed on vinyl applied directly onto the walls, and a series of photographs of kid goats taken during a photo shoot in the space itself.

'Performing the self' and the construction of identity in our current social media era, Sage's poetic and entertaining vignettes reflect prevailing visual and cultural codes that exist around and between art, mass media, gender, self-representation, and the selfie.

David Liss

Exhibition curator

I began experimenting with photography, video, and self portraiture in 2017. The decision to focus on self-portraiture arose out of practical necessity. Certain works, such as I Brought You Flowers proved dangerous to attempt and time-intensive, which made it difficult to find someone else to be the model. I developed techniques for doing photoshoots by myself using a remote. My work makes reference to the contemporary advertising imagery found in bus stations and billboards, drawing inspiration from

its vibrant colors and compositions. My practice, focused on self-portraiture, draws upon the work of Cindy Sherman by appropriating contemporary commercial aesthetics and styles, typically created by large teams of professionals working for prominent brands, to focus on fleeting emotions and mundane objects.

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Exhibition Credits

Artist, Sage Szkabarnicki-Stuart
Curator, David Liss
Installation Technician, Emily DiCarlo
Assistant on goat photoshoot, Leni Bonjour-Liss

Koffler Arts

General Director, Matthew Jocelyn
Director of External Relations, Laura Chapnick-Klein
Sr. Mgr. of Marketing & Communications, Melissa Than
Head of Artistic Engagement, Josh Heuman
Gallery & Production Manager, Meredith Kenny
Office Manager, Maria Segura
Communications & Outreach Coordinator, Talie Shalmon