

Lynda Gammon's Portraits
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When Lynda Gammon hits the spherize filter in Photoshop, the facial features of her "portraits" are arbitrarily rearranged. In this series of photographs, it is the unexpected and enigmatic results from this digitally-precise mechanistic procedure that shape data into spheres that is accentuated. The artist's process involved carving one hundred Roma apples with faces that are left to shrink and then are individually documented, edited, enlarged and printed again. The image degradation from this sequence of mediations draws out connotation of the instability of vision. Favouring a handmade pinhole camera, she exploits the shadowy imperfections of black-and-white pinhole photographs. Lensless cameras record light rays as if x-rays in a way that makes the material presence of light palpable. The artist's preoccupation with obscured perception – evident in the skewed and under-lit spaces of her sculptural constructions and installations – in this work is extended to picturing human presence.

Here we encounter five grey spheres. Although immediately suggestive of portraiture, these unnaturally large heads with indistinct facial features and vacant eyes defy any identity. Emptied of specificity and resemblance, they seem more like death masks, mute signs. As we scan their doughy, scarred surfaces, various associations arise – molecules, heavenly bodies, apparitions and embryonic forms. Shifting between macro and micro references, their blotchy skins, seem to be in a state of cellular mutation or dissolution, as if life forces were slipping away in the process of dying. Evident here is the artist's interest in scientific simulations of the invisible, such as images of digitized viruses and planetary events, /the disorienting effect of identifying with these fields of energy and matter – adrift in an ambiguous time and space – as portraits is much like relating to abstract medical images of the interior of the human body. Moreover, considering that twenty-first-century genetics pictures human identity in terms of genetic mapping whereby the human body is conceived as a system of programmed information, portraiture now embraces the invisible. Gammon's response to these conditions accentuates the very impulse to recognize.

As with scientific images that are used not so much as documentation but as sites of discovery, the vagueness of Gammon's spheres provokes a haptic form of knowledge. From an initial condition of misrecognition, we are invited to make comparisons and establish likeness, as the artist herself does in the process of editing. Working with Duchenne de Boulogne's nineteenth-century theories of physiognomy that attempted to chart the grammar of human facial expression by linking external features to inner character, she proposes a taxonomy of primary human emotions. The original apple photographs are indexed by cross-referencing Duchenne's categories of emotion with a list of tuber begonia descriptions: delicate lilac with pink spots/grim acceptance, rose boy/cares of the world, stroke-able dicentra/sad innocence, pale salmon pink/exceptionally hardy. From this idiosyncratic system of identifications, the artist selected iconic expressions related

to notions of “the humours” and the elemental “passions of the soul.” Understanding how systems of valuation that organize emotion by type and name are tropes for mapping a fragmentary self, these deliberations offer little in the way of an ordered universe. Instead, the impulse to project a scientific rationalist system onto human qualities falls apart, for in the end Gammons’ spheres remain unformed and some to life through misrecognition.