



External Space

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1st Place

Michelle Homonylo

June 23 – August 3, 2015

The often disparate worlds of competitive sport and contemporary art meet in the absurdly arranged and hilariously appropriated world of Michelle Homonylo's *1st Place*. The work is an absurd, self-deprecating take on sport culture, juxtaposing domestic environments with the common actions and occurrences of the competitive playing field. Both settings convey the isolating, singular pursuit of excellence within their respective existences. Through a combination of found footage and performance-based video, Homonylo relocates the Olympic swim meet, transporting the familiar routines and movements of the competitive swimmer into the familiar confines of a dated 1970s suburban rec room. The work represents a comedic tension between the professional and amateur, exploring the dual realities of each subject within their respective environments. The resulting narrative utilizes humour and absurdity to engage in a conversation around representations of women's bodies across competitive and domestic settings.

Homonylo's roots in photo-based work inform the way in which her video work is executed. *1st Place* is the latest in a series of analogue photos and video works that see the artist perform a series of scenarios that reclaim and re-appropriate the use of portraiture and self-portraiture in relation to the female body. The earlier video works in this series employed a lo-fi aesthetic and did not rely on narrative progression or continuity, instead presenting a series of individual scenarios that allows the viewer to draw their own meanings and conclusions.

While employing the same lo-fi home video aesthetic, *1st Place* differs from these previous works, making use of a narrative arc that is both self-deprecating and empowering.

1st Place is the first work in which Homonylo employs elements of humour as a means of disarming the viewer, while also acting as an element of defense against the vulnerable scenarios the artist places herself in. The video's narrative walks a fine line between focused intensity and outright farce. One cannot help but take Homonylo seriously as she positions herself, ready to dive off the edge of the rec room's pool table, while also recognizing the outright absurdity of this moment. Homonylo's video work takes influence from comedian and performance artist Alan Resnick's *alantutorial* web series, in which the artist enacts a series of increasingly bizarre "how-to" parody videos.

Homonylo remains the principle subject of the work, but as the artist attests, assumes the alter ego of amateur swimmer. Homonylo challenges the viewer to disassociate themselves from the gaze of a casual weekend sports fan, forcing a negotiation between the generic settings of the swim meet and rec room. The compromising, somewhat surreal performance appropriates sporting ritual, with Homonylo's character of the amateur swimmer calling into question the hyper-feminized, sexualized, and commoditized portrayal of the modern female athlete. By locating her performance in the confines of hyper-domestic setting, Homonylo creates a conversation between the two disparate but interconnected realms of female objectification – domesticity and competitiveness – and in the process aims to create a new realm of individual empowerment.

- **Jon Lockyer**