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Adad Hannah: Studio Portraits

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Equinox Gallery, Vancouver

Equinox Gallery is pleased to present *Studio Portraits*, an exhibition of new work by Adad Hannah. The photographs and video works in this exhibition bring together staging techniques of early portrait photography and the use of mirroring to explore complex relationships between viewer and subject.

19th century portrait photographers who staged the studio for their sitters used mirrors to present multiple angles of their subject within a single exposure. This technique was later employed everywhere from medical photography to mug shots – where the accused could be presented both head-on and in profile by strategically placing a half-moon-shaped mirror on his or her shoulder. Mirrors made possible the earliest self-portraits, and have been employed in painting for centuries to extend pictorial space and interrogate the viewing process in various ways. Hannah's *Studio Portraits* play on these techniques, while also using mirrors as a tool to disrupt and disorient spatial compositions, resisting a straightforward narrative. Mounted atop armatures resembling camera rods, lighting rigs or selfie sticks, the mirrors in *Studio Portraits* were designed by Hannah to be quickly maneuverable while shooting, allowing for spontaneity during each portrait session. As Hannah notes, "the resulting photographs and videos read like collages or paintings, as the reflected fragments of objects outside of the camera's frame assert themselves within the image."

For over 15 years, Hannah has been exploring the use of mirrors and mirroring in his practice as a tool to expose a world beyond the sharp edges of the picture frame. In 2003, two of Hannah's projects - *Make-Up* and *Mascara Removal* - relied upon mirrors to show his subjects examining themselves. In *The Prado Project* (2008), Hannah explored the reception of art by embedding mirrors in museums. And in other projects such as *Internal Logic: Camping*, commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2006, Hannah created tableaux vivants which spoke about mirrors and mirroring *without* the use of actual mirrors.

The objects and staging in *Studio Portraits* reference August Sander's comprehensive portrait project titled *People of the Twentieth Century*, for which the artist spent decades creating portraits of German society in an effort to present, as he described, "a physiognomic image of an age". Sander often photographed his subjects with particular objects or clothing which signified elements of their character or skill. As with

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many of his projects, Hannah prefers to work with nonprofessional models who wear their own clothes and explore their own movements, encouraging the viewer to consider their own bodies in relation to the work.

Adad Hannah has explored historically trenchant themes through elaborate bodies of work that include installation, video and photography for nearly three decades. Inspired by the historical practice of tableaux vivant (“living pictures”), time occupies a prominent place in Hannah’s production, forced by a lasting interest in temporality and its complex relationship with photography and video. His work is represented in such major public collections as the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Musée Rodin, Paris, France; the LEEUM Museum, Seoul, South Korea; The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Adad Hannah lives and works in Vancouver, Canada.