

# Swiss Institute

## Descartes' Daughter

**September 18 – November 1, 2013**

Curated by Piper Marshall

Legend says that the grief and sadness René Descartes experienced over the death of his daughter Francine (1635 - 1640) propelled him both to write philosophical discourse and to build an animatronic effigy in her name. The mind and the body, though two sides of the same coin, present something of a problem in art and philosophy. One reason may be that Cartesian dualism and the subsequent philosophical trajectory erects a binary that is not completely rational, at least according to the logic of the whole. Like this philosophical hiccup, the artwork often fits awkwardly within a framework of psychic and somatic expression, filed away as either conceptual (mind) or expressive (body). These categories, which are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, are historically gendered. The exhibition, Descartes' Daughter, brings together sculpture, painting, and video that perform as interlocutors, jeopardizing these preconceived categories. The title of the show departs from the eponymous myth, Descartes' personal tribute, a transitional object, a conceptual and mental exercise in a pseudo-human form.

Descartes' Daughter will provide an important survey of contemporary art practice, joined with a historical overview, enabling a unique re-evaluation of how contemporary art can turn away from preconceived philosophical and gender categorizations. Descartes' Daughter will highlight a number of emerging New York-based and international artists within a historical framework. The exhibit will provide viewers with an educational and conceptual experience that encourages (even relies upon) viewer engagement. Descartes' Daughter will explore how contemporary art acts as a form of inquiry into both psychic, conceptual expression and the somatic, intuitive response. The selected artworks—sculpture, painting, and video—contribute to the ongoing development of a complex dialogue where art, with its implication of mental exercise and mobilization of physical process, have the potential to deconstruct and challenge the body in its anthropomorphic and social representation.

Considered artists include:

Hanne Darboven

John Chamberlain

Jason Loeb

Lucas Knipscher

Rochelle Goldberg

Charline von Heyl

John Chamberlain

Nicolas Guagnini / Jeff Preiss

Melanie Gilligan