

## MELISSA WILGIS: SHE TELLS A STORY PHOTOGRAMS

### ARTIST STATEMENT

*She Tells a Story* is a series of unique silver gelatin photograms made using vintage and antique women's undergarments. The alluring images are ethereal and dream-like, with a delicate strength. They are surprisingly tactile. Once hung, they appear to be strikingly three-dimensional, as though the actual garment is under glass. At first glance, the subjects seem simple against a stark background. Upon closer inspection, the delicate ribbons, lacey hems, firm boning, and timeless net lace provide more to discover.

The subjects in the series are all vintage and antique, therefore likely worn before. When I am working on a photogram, I try to visualize the person who wore the garment. I generally do not see faces, but rather fleeting images of torsos and limbs against various backdrops: simple or elaborate, seductive or domestic, light or dark. In truth though, the garment and the light do the important work in the darkroom. They tell the story, while I simply move things around. I often spend fifteen or twenty minutes repositioning a garment on the paper, adjusting and repeating as necessary. If I am printing on the counter, I will climb up as high as I can to get a bird's eye view. If I am printing on the floor, I will crawl and walk around. While it might be easier if I had more light to see what I am doing, that would also take a lot of the fun out of it. Anticipation has always been one of my favorite things about the darkroom.

The simplicity of my photograms allows the viewer to find their own story, be it feminism, gender identity, sexuality, and body image; materialism, cultural narratives, politics, economics, and fashion; or simply personal nostalgia. To me, the photograms are first and foremost a reminder to always try to see things in a different light. They are not just garments. There is always a story behind them.

**EXHIBITION HISTORY**

- Wilma Daniels Gallery, Wilmington, NC, The Art of Nature Photography Exhibit, Group Show, July 2018 (Portion of proceeds donated to Cape Fear River Watch)
- Wilma Daniels Gallery, Wilmington, NC, CFCC Technicians Group Show, June 2018
- LOCAL: art + ideas, Wilmington, NC, Look, Think, Shop, December 2017
- Hannah Block Community Arts Center, Wilmington NC, Juried Show and Sale, September 2017
- Cameron Art Museum, Wilmington NC, State of the Art, November 2017
- Landfall Foundation Art Show and Sale, Wilmington, NC, August 2017
- Spring Flea at Brooklyn Arts Center, Wilmington NC, June 2017
- Historic Wilmington Foundation Sip & Shop, Wilmington, NC, May 2017
- Art for All, Brooklyn Arts Center, Wilmington, NC, February 2017
- Contemporary South Exhibit at Raleigh VAE, Raleigh, NC, February 2017
- For the Love of Art fundraiser, Raleigh VAE, Raleigh, NC, February 2017
- Community Show, Carrack Museum of Modern Art, Durham, NC, Jan 2017
- Second Skin Vintage Artist Talk and Show, Wilmington, NC, October 2016
- Aces Gallery, Wilmington NC, Group Show, March 2016
- SALT Studio, Wilmington NC, Group Show, June 2015
- NC Coastal Federation, Wrightsville Beach NC, Solo exhibit, August 2014 to December 2015, (Portion of proceeds donated to NC Coastal Federation)
- LOCAL: art + ideas, Wilmington NC, Private, solo show, December 2013
- Figments Gallery, Wilmington NC, Represented January 2012 to August 2014
- Auntie M's Place at Bell-More, Newport NC, Wholesale sale, 2013
- Uptown Market, Wilmington NC, Retail Vendor August 2010 to October 2013
- Acme Art Studio, Wilmington NC, Group Show, July 2012
- Hanover Center Spring Craft Market, Wilmington NC, April 2012
- Orange Street Arts Fest, Wilmington NC, May 2010, 2011, 2012 (Portion of proceeds donated to Historic Wilmington Foundation)
- Old Books on Front Street, Wilmington NC, Solo Show, May 2012, May 2011 (Portion of proceeds donated to Historic Wilmington Foundation)
- Cape Fear Community College, Wilmington NC, Student Art Show, 2010
- Friends of Atalaya Group Show, Murrells Inlet SC, March 2011
- One Wicked Gallery, Wilmington NC, Group Show, July 2011
- Art Box, Wilmington NC, Group Show, July 2010
- UNCW Randall Public Library, Most Threatened Places Education Exhibit, 2011