

Katherine Kortikow's exhibition "Cipher" shuffles three elements into five discrete juxtapositions. The arrested video images are fragments of a woman's face uttering, pausing and uttering an unknown testimony. Spliced alongside these are long, mobile exposures of a public monument that dissolve to abstraction as the camera circumnavigates the carved stone. Void bars remain on the left of the montage works although they vary in proportion from image to image. Adjacent to the transmounted photographs, slate rectangles are bolted to the wall, echoing the pictured monuments stone surface and supporting an oblique reference to written language when combined with the hovering illegible text that hovers over the woman's mouth.

As representations of the female body, these fractured traces of earlier cultural products refer on the one hand to the use of the body of Woman as a symbol in the conventions of public statuary (in this case Paid Maternity of the teacher) and on the other as a non-idealized individual flattened across the video screen - perhaps a 'positive' image of woman from a past moment in feminism's struggle with representation. These glimpsed references alternate in relation to the fixed rectangular black bars and the inarticulate text that is laid over the face of the video-mediated woman. This secret writing exists only as a reference to text - the reader is barred access to its function as representation. The panels of slate present blank faces, not drawn upon or incised, devoid of meaningful marks.

The viewer is placed at a forced distance from these appropriations as the pre-existing representations of woman suffer distortion to the point of disintegration by the intervening camera and darkroom technique. They are given up to the viewer as transitory, in flux, categories with diffuse boundaries. If we understand culture as a signifying practice, ~~an~~ an arena that produces meanings and works to fix them rather than adequately or inadequately reflecting lived experience, we can readily see the importance of the continual reiteration of the category Woman to patriarchy as well as culture's potential for intervention and subversion. It is within this discourse that the dilemma surrounding representation resides. To augment the category Woman with more 'realistic' representations runs the risk of the 'alternative' merely eliding to or becoming subsumed by the dominant. To despair of direct visual representations of the body is to fundamentally deny the effects of inhabiting a female body within patriarchal culture. Kortikow's strategy to destabilize and force a distance from the existing representational categories deflects our attachment to one or the other of these 'options', resisting the polemic aspect of current feminist discourse. The viewer is placed in a transitional place within this problematic with one strategic possibility at hand: the slate, placed at the end points of the image

sequences, can be seen as a site upon which an image/word can be momentarily applied, always subject to erasure, adaptation, augmentation, never fixed.