

# POOR NYMPHS, POORER SELVES

by **Hannah Sage Kay**

These poor nymphs of the present, distorted by the endless screens they must pass through before finding themselves in something resembling “the real world.” Unaccustomed to the weight of what we might call reality, they fall out of an infinite space-time into the brutal pull, or rather push, of gravity. Contorted and mutilated, their softened features and smooth, undifferentiated, albeit clothed, bodies still possess the residue of some former grace, now misplaced.

The nymph has historically been an encapsulation of humanity’s relationship with nature, a more pure, naive, sincere incarnation of life than we could ever hope to embody ourselves. The three poor, gray nymphs, splayed here at odd angles on the floor or leaning against the wall, rather resemble a shadow of their former selves—an embodiment of our collective decline and failure to reach some technologically enhanced ideal promised by the 21st century.

Here, in this state of aspirational purgatory, the poor nymph is caught looking both forward and back, between a nostalgia for the porcelain-skin marble monoliths of ancient Greek and Roman statuary that embodied the height of artistic and, in terms of the Greek, engineering excellence—standing without tree stump or staff to hold them upright—and the imagined efficiency of our own replication and reconstruction within real and virtual futures that is somehow thought to ease our blight and take away our pain.

This muddy space is one of glitches and afterimages, poor images and ever poorer selves.

The nymphs, or *ninfa*, that Aby Warburg chronicled are “threshold beings,” frozen forever in a state of motion—between mobility and immobility—as an embodiment of universalized gesture (at least to his western, 20th century mind). This collection of innumerably repeated poses, from antiquity to the art historian’s 1920s present, that comprise his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, allegedly reveals “the life of images” or, I might argue by way of Panofsky, a history of bodily iconology. Yes, the gestures that characterize the figures culled by Warburg unveil a lasting, pseudomorphic correlation between past and present symbolization. We may continue to possess many of the same mannerisms and interpret them similarly, but no man alive tips his hat as he passes me on the street, and I should rather be alarmed if he makes eye contact at all.

So while Panofsky attests that gestures carry some socially embodied and thus timeless meaning, our sociality inevitably shifts and with it the constant repetition and recontextualization, or more aptly insidious appropriation and manipulation, of gesture becomes the stuff of false narratives, and maybe even false hopes.

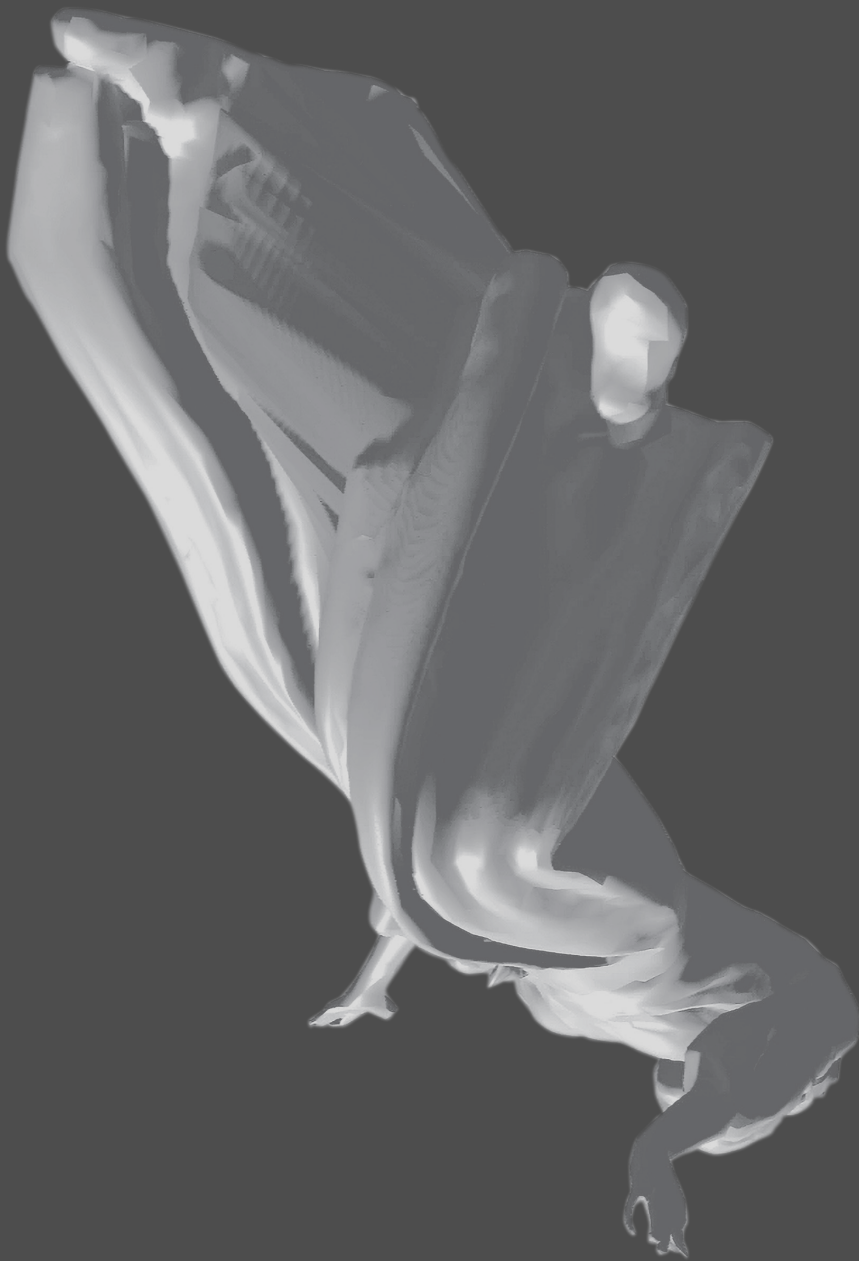
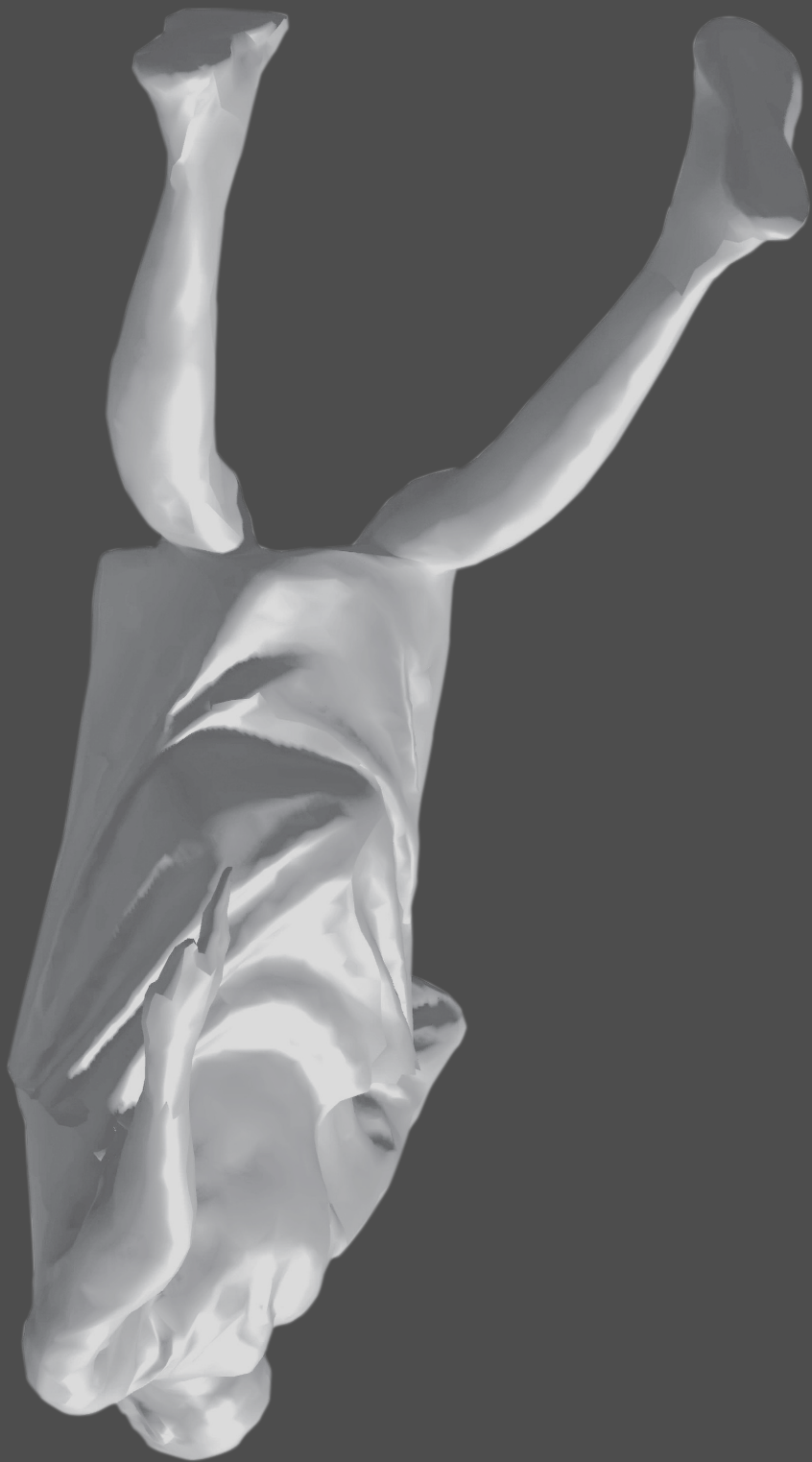
Is it a salute or is it a hail, is it ignorance or is it malice? It’s both, it’s neither; who’s looking and when?

Now, trapped by the gaze of many lenses, the nymphs of the present are no longer carved in marble or wrought in bronze, but rather captured by the omnipresent presence of detection. The three individuals who allegedly offered up their bodily incarnations to the banal, algorithmic violence of our machines have here become depersonalized figures—products of a formula, a type.

They are everyone and they are no one.

**Hannah Sage Kay** is an arts writer and critic based in New York, and occasionally Los Angeles. She studied modern and contemporary art at NYU’s Institute of Fine Arts and Bard College, and has contributed to *Artforum*, *Autre*, *The Art Newspaper*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Financial Times*, and *Los Angeles Review of Books*, amongst other publications.

**Lynne Marsh** is a Canadian artist living and working in Los Angeles, where she is Associate Professor in the Art Department at UC Riverside. Solo exhibitions of her work have been presented at the Barbara & Art Culver Center of the Arts at UCR ARTS, Riverside, USA; Tintype Gallery, London; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; Opera North, Leeds; ICA, London; Toronto International Film Festival; and Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal. Her work has also been featured in numerous group exhibitions and perennial events, including La Biennale de Montréal; Manif d’art 5–The Québec City Biennial; and the Istanbul Biennial. A unique publication, part-reader, part-artist monograph, entitled *She Moves Me: Performance, Moving Image, and Lynne Marsh’s Lens*, edited by Sylvie Fortin, will be co-published by Inventory Press and Press Enter this year.



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Lynne Marsh

# STANDING DEATH BACKWARD

6.7—7.5.2025

## WORKS LIST

*Standing Death Backward Frame 23*

70" x 42.6" x 27.1"

CNC-milled high-density urethane foam, EPSILON™ epoxy coating, automotive filler primer, Bondo, Bondo glass, joint compound, clear Gorilla Glue, spray paint

*Corkscrew Evade Frame 26*

24.9" x 60" x 22.1"

CNC-milled high-density urethane foam, EPSILON™ epoxy coating, automotive filler primer, Bondo, Bondo glass, joint compound, steel, clear Gorilla Glue, spray paint

*Floating Frame 52*

44.6" x 62.3" x 33.2"

CNC-milled high-density urethane foam, EPSILON™ epoxy coating, automotive filler primer, Bondo, Bondo glass, joint compound, clear Gorilla Glue, spray paint

## Credits

Performers: Gustine Fudickar, Abriel Gardner, and Ryan OByrne

Fabrication: Devin Wilson

## Funding

Canada Council for the Arts

