

Tarrah Krajnak at as-is.la

April 3, 2019
Text by Catherine Wagley



Tarrah Krajnak, *1979: Contact Negatives* (2019) (installation view). Image courtesy of the artist and as-is.la.

Tarrah Krajnak's exhibition *1979: Contact Negatives* at as-is.la is refreshingly self-contained. With the exception of a few differently sized white pedestals, Krajnak made the work on site, inside the modest Pico Union gallery. Before the show opened, she used the pedestals as set pieces that she moved around and posed on while the light of projected, found photos taken in 1979 Peru washed over her. That year, the country transitioned out of military rule and the artist was born in Lima—she left the city as an infant, after a couple from Pennsylvania adopted her from an orphanage. Krajnak photographed herself posing, and developed her self portraits at the gallery in the days before her opening, making cyanotypes in the sunlight right outside and contact negatives inside, using a portable darkroom. The chemicals and equipment are still laid out on leftover pedestals, now part of the exhibition, while the negatives sit on light boxes and the cyanotypes hang from a clothesline. A lightly-blurred 1979 image of a topless nightclub performer projects against the remaining, leaning pedestals. Dimly lit, the room feels like the site of a conjuring or ritual.

Since it opened a year and a half ago, as-is.la has largely focused on historical, under-exhibited Los Angeles artists who began working in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. At first glance, Krajnak's installation looks vintage too: the analogue photographic techniques plus the actual 1970s imagery. Her photographs also have an inquisitive, performative quality that recalls the performance documentation of Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, and Yayoi Kusama, all at work in the 1960s and 1970s and all masterful mergers of spontaneity and polish.

Krajnak appears simultaneously aware of the camera and lost in her own experiment, an effect that makes the viewer feel both voyeuristic and entirely necessary. She performed without us, but then set up all the evidence strategically enough to make us feel we were there. We are witness to her summoning of a historical moment, something she has done in previous work as well—with collaborator Wilka Roig, researching and re-creating representations of the female body throughout history (after a critic told both artists their use of their own bodies was "over burdened by emotion"); re-photographing the oeuvre of indigenous Peruvian photographer Martín Chambi (1891-1973). But in this case, Krajnak's installation feels far less like a reconsideration of the past than a portal through which past and present collide and collapse into each other—representations of the politically-shifting place and time of her birth encompass Krajnak as she navigates and poses, trying to figure out how her body fits within the image-scape of her past.

Tarrah Krajnak: *1979: Contact Negatives* runs from March 10–April 20, 2019 at as-is.la (1133 Venice Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90015).



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