

# LINDA CUMMINGS

## SLIPPAGES (1992-2002)



*LETTING GO, 1999*

SLIPPAGES is a performance-based photographic project in which a subtle, subversive drama is cast upon ready-made “stages”: amphitheaters, stadiums, steel mills and coal mines, hospital and churches, burial grounds, canyons and wetlands. Its duration spans the 90’s, the threshold of the millennia, against the backdrop of the social, cultural and technological movement from the physical to the digital era. Within each frame a slip is set loose, by a hidden hand, to perform its air-borne act of disrupting narratives of the status quo. Catching the wind, the slip reveals itself through gesture, juxtaposition, contradiction, association and metaphor. I purchased seven slips of various color and density, iconic garments of gender, in thrift stores - each previously worn by an anonymous woman. Each carried the imprint, stains and marks of its previous life. I traveled the United States with my supple troupe in search of specific locations, defined by tradition and history as firm and fixed, and thereupon posited something unexpected, out of place.

All photographs in the SLIPPAGES portfolios were created on-site, with a traditional film camera, no post-production or darkroom manipulation and printed by hand as archival silver gelatin photographs. Below are signature images and brief descriptions from each of the (10) portfolios that comprise the SLIPPAGES project.

# LINDA CUMMINGS



CHASM, 2002

## FISSURES, 1992-2002

The haunted and hunted Indigenous landscape of the American Southwest was my ground zero. I wanted to unearth its secret presence through an absence of those whose remains were but traces in dirt and sky. Each toss of the slip was in defiance to the power of forgetting – a gestural attempt to literally re-member and re-call what had been disavowed in our cultural memory and landscape. To call forth what's been buried but unerasable from collective conscience.



IN THE NAME OF THE DAUGHTER, 1994

## ECCLESIASTIC, 1994-1996

The power of scripture to guide and give comfort to many, can also be turned against the vulnerable and consolidate power in the hands of a few. The abuse of this power sows fear and contempt for natural human desire and difference, especially toward the feminine and the flesh. In churches and graveyards I tossed the empty slip to posit a radical return of the repressed feminine and conjure the disavowed fleshy body .



LIBERTY, 1995

## STAGES, 1994-2001

Sites memorializing significant cultural beliefs, artifacts or events project a powerful sense of identity, shared meaning and history. Selected are markers of place, value or identity – monuments, artworks, landmarks, architectural or cultural sites often unnoticed, forgotten, or standing silently in stark contrast to the beliefs and values they once represented. Most sites are off-limits, treacherous, or restricted, and required trespassing or laborious permissions for access.

# LINDA CUMMINGS



EXCHANGE VALUES, 1996

## STEEL CITY, 1996-1997

This portfolio emerged from what I witnessed of the colliding technological and economic forces at play in the rapidly changing late 20th century landscape of steel mills and coal mines in the rust-belt of Pennsylvania, where I spent my childhood. Now extinct mills and mines reflect the power of a by-gone era while phantom slips allude to the invisible social relations within the masculine archetype upon which this power was built and prospered. To cast the slip within the context of decaying industrial architecture is to set in motion a metaphor that, on the surface, suggest that roles are changing and all that may have once existed is now but an apparition, in question, or in flux.



DECENTRALIZER, 1997

## OVULATOR SERIES, 1997

All photographs were taken in New York stadiums, many of which are now gone. During each shoot I was surrounded by security personnel who observed and governed my movements. Growing up before Title IX benefits gave equal access to girls sports in school, these photographs pay homage, like flags of resistance, to the few brave girls and women who defied expectation and tradition by forming “Leagues of Their Own”. I created these photographs both in defiance to this inequity and also, to create a space for the emptiness and loss felt by the vast silent majority were forced to the sidelines as cultural expectations devalued female athleticism. Like dreams, the slips can be filled by imaginary heroines, responding to the forbidden desires of imaginary audiences.

# LINDA CUMMINGS



BASEBALL CARD SET, 1997  
(OVULATOR SERIES)

As an additional part of my performance, I created a set of trading cards of phantom “players” in the Ovulator Series which I distributed to young girls attending baseball games in Yankee stadium. The trading cards provide a portal into an imaginary game in which females write the rules and make up the game. Narratives on the back of each card weave hybrid tales of fantasy and fact to expose gendered divisions of labor in the stadium.



DIVE I, 1998

## ANATOMY OF A FANTASY, 1998

The swimming pool pictured in this portfolio was among the first sites in the country where women could privately compete in athletic competitions on estates owned by wealthy patrons. This site, Bamboo Brook, was designed and built by Martha Brooks Hutchinson in the 1920s in New Jersey.

The manufactured strings in this series represent powerful man-made forces at play in preventing the fulfilment of a dive, and thus expose the limits to the fantasy of freedom of motion. The slip hovers mid-air in resistance to the laws of gravity, time, and cultural repression. The performance documents the movement of this suspended slip over a 7-day period in which environmental forces eventually triumph and deliver the dive to the water.



RE-ACTOR III, 1998

## THREE MILE ISLAND, 1998-2001

This series is a reflection on the nuclear reactor accident at Three Mile Island. The fragility and nimbleness of the slip caught by the wind against the backdrop of the rigid, restrictive and alienating tower of a nuclear reactor emitting dark and ominous smoke into the air alludes to the vulnerability of human beings. These photographs point to our existential

# LINDA CUMMINGS

condition of living in, and creating technologies with hidden destructive powers. The site of a damaged nuclear reactor and its radioactive contaminants is the backdrop in which I cast this tiny white slip—in part a gesture of defiance and in part, a flag of surrender.



VISION, 1999

## SARATOGA RACETRACK, 2000

While on a residency at Yaddo Artist Colony, in Saratoga Springs, NY I was first introduced to its historic racetrack, opened in 1863 during the height of the Civil War. A haunting absence is present in its dark and storied architecture. This portfolio is an embodiment of chance. Like the horses, jockies and weathy patrons in search of their trophy—I set the slip loose to find its dancing partner in the dusty cavernous interior of the empty stands on a cold January morning.. This performative photographic act is the embodiment of the dance between chance and anticipation. Will the wind and the slip find each other - will they ride their lucky break? Will the camera produce its trophy of this magic? Just like going to the races.



LAPSE, 2001

## WETLANDS, 2000-2001

At the dawn of the millenium, the air was electric with anticipation of what was to come. Restlessness was palpable, the technology of the future was measured in gigabytes and internet speed instead of barrels and miles per hour. As the physical world was quickly morphing into a digital space and screens I began to wander further afield in search for “something else”. I wanted to try to give form to the dissolution of the physical and to visualize the shape of speed. I let loose the slips like a kite in a landscape as vast and varied as the sense of possibility felt in the air. I went to the edges

# LINDA CUMMINGS

of the Atlantic, where water meets land. In an unending vista of marsh and sky I called forth the invisible, aleatoric forces of wind, water, earth and sky that shape the physical environment we belong to. I set off in search of a centering calm in a world spinning with complexity and change.



*OPERATING THEATER VIII,*  
2002

## OPERATING THEATER, 2002

These photographs were made at St. Vincent's hospital in New York City, which no longer exists. The site was chosen initially in response to the alarming number of my friends succumbing to breast cancer. As the post 9/11-war in Iraq began to unfold the operating room provided a site to express my "shock and awe" at both the horror of an unfolding military invasion and the striking speed of a disease that laid bare the vulnerability and strength of the physical body under the penetrating gaze of medical technology. The "operating theater" is a term used for the staging of both medicine and war – a physical space within which bodies are re-configured, dis-membered and repaired, destroyed or restored. The slips in these photographs suggest both the figuration and disfiguration that occurs during medical interventions and surgical procedures. The slips animate this sterile space, rising and hovering in both resistance, transcendence and surrender to the clinical decisions made that either destroy or restore or the human body.