

## Nuit Blanche: An Engaging Conversation with Wendy Paton

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There really is no question that the photography in *Wendy Paton: Nuit Blanche* is dramatically alluring. Wendy Paton's study on night, abstract portraiture, and transformations in human nature create a mysterious dialogue between the photograph and the viewer. This dialogue transcends the superficiality of traditional portraiture as her images cause us to think deeply about human personalities, self-consciousness, liberation, and vulnerability. These are photographs that have striped away the conventionality of a portrait and in its place, created a new form that is bold, honest, and definitely dramatic.



Lips ©2013 Wendy Paton, selenium toned, gelatin silver print from the series, Visages de Nuit

One of my favorite works in this exhibition is Paton's photograph, *Lips*. In its essence, a pair of lips, a finger, and a tissue should not be considered a portrait, but Paton regards it as such. For her, portraiture does not capture only the image of the person, but must reflect something much deeper. In an artistic statement concerning

this vision, Paton states:

*I attempt to capture the many layers of the human personality; how in the darkness of night we either attempt to cover up, or allow the layers to be peeled back and expose the emotions within. The images' dark, gritty characteristics purposely convey the surreal qualities of what i feel is hiding behind what we normally view as reality.*

Interpreting this, I gain a better understanding of *Lips*. Just by looking at the photograph initially I could sense its drama and seduction. My mind immediately connected it to the genre of Film Noir because it was as mysterious, dark, and provocative as the dangerous romances seen in those films. Knowing that there is more to the photo than just a pair of lips, this work transforms into a representation of freedom, self expression, even danger. It is raw, emotional, suggestive, and highly thought provoking.

Now pair *Lips* with Paton's other work of a dented car hood, *Untitled #2*, and we can explore these ideas even further. How do the two interact with one another? By examining them together, do we uncover any more insights about human personalities or self meaning? Paton leaves it up to the viewer to decide. She believes that it is not her job to tell an audience what to think. Instead the voice of each photograph lies with us. We decide what each piece is about based on our emotion and



Untitled #2 ©2013 Wendy Paton, selenium toned gelatin silver print from the series, Reclaiming Dignity

perceptions. This is what I love most about this exhibition because Paton is raising some fantastic questions that touch at self consciousness and humanity yet the final conclusions are determined by us. The emotion, drama, and intrigue behind her photography allow us to decide what we feel each work, either individually or as a whole, is reflecting about our society. This is the dialogue between *Wendy Paton: Nuit Blanche* and us, and it definitely is a captivating one!

*Wendy Paton: Nuit Blanche* opened August 23rd and will stay open until December 7th.

Taylor Hunkins