

# KELLYE EISWORTH

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## *Topographies of Pain* - Project Statement

*Topographies of Pain* is an exploration of pain and the act of bearing witness through marks on the body. Whether the result of accident, surgery, or self-infliction, the physical evidence of trauma intimates a deeper internal suffering. These marks serve as maps of individual experience and personal history; memories recorded in the flesh.

The series consists of three distinct types of images; each offers a different lens through which to consider pain. The first of these is comprised of close-up investigations of marks on the body. When exhibited, these human topographies confront the viewer as large scale aluminum prints. Pigment prints in various sizes reveal a more direct perspective of the mark in relation to the body, while portraits of the subjects form the conclusion of the work as intimate objects returning the viewer's gaze.

Though the photographs feature many different subjects, the work is guided by my own intimate understanding of pain. When I was thirteen I was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. Unable to cope with my volatile emotions, I tried to assuage the psychological pain in a physical way; I cut myself. As a result my body is covered with scars, a public display of my personal suffering.

This idea of the body as a site of memory and expressed emotion is particularly potent when viewed through a feminist lens. Through the inherently violent act of marring the surface of the female form, it is irrevocably differentiated from the archetypal to the singular. In this way, the marked body challenges the cultural construct of the female form as aesthetic object.

*Topographies of Pain* grapples with the ethical implications of the act of looking and what it means to bear witness to the pain of others. At once both intimate and aggressive, this relationship is dependent on the willingness of both participants to see and be seen by the other. The photographs work to use this shared vulnerability as a point of connection, collapsing the distinction between self and other where the pain of revealing and the pain of looking at that which is revealed converge.