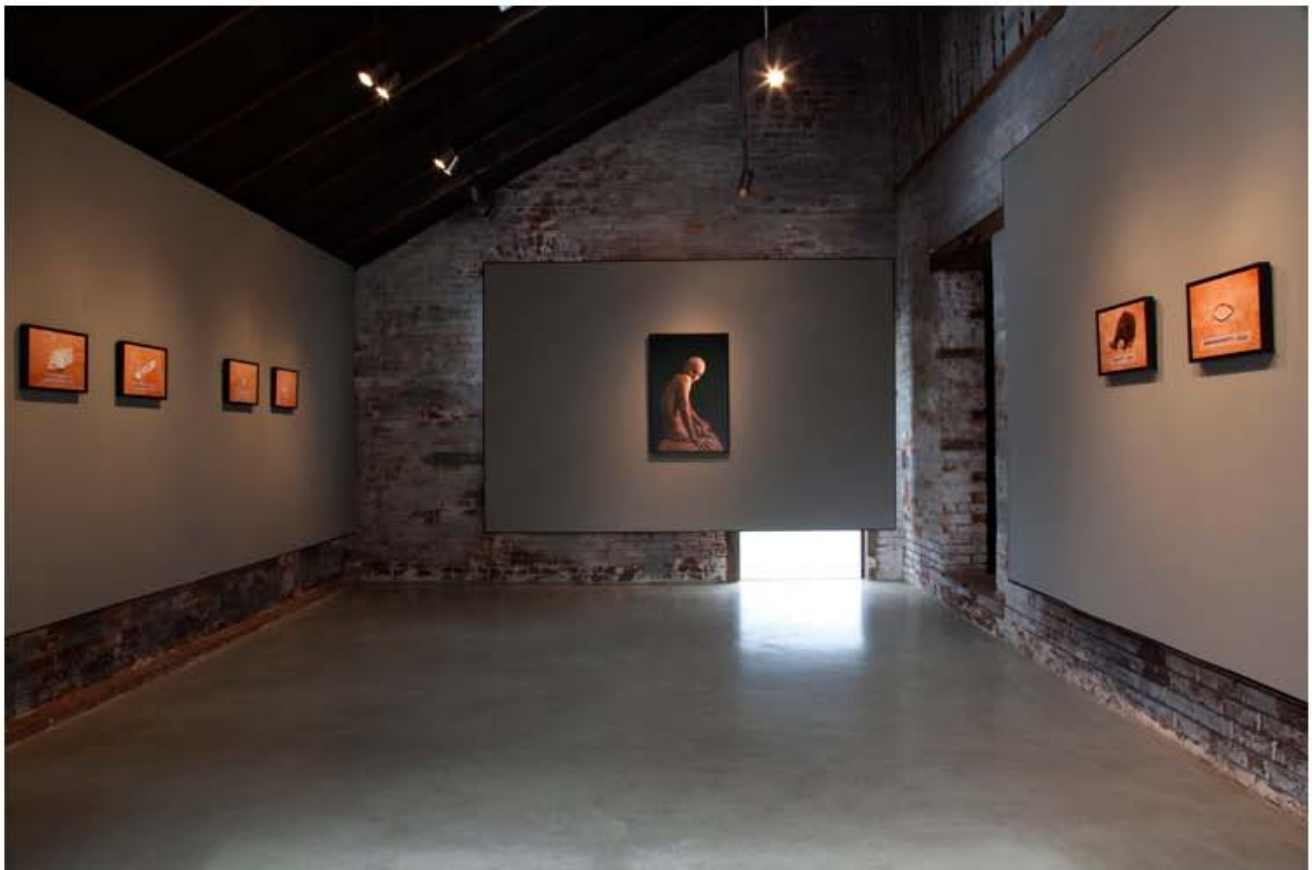


BURNAWAY

The Power of *1.2 cm=* at Whitespace Gallery

Written By Lilly Lampe on January 23, 2013 in **Reviews**



Installation image, Constance Thalken, *1.2cm=*, Whitespace Gallery, January 11-February 16, 2013, Courtesy of Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta

1.2 cm= at **Whitespace Gallery** chronicles artist Constance Thalken's recent triumphant battle with breast cancer through statistical information, documentation of artifacts, and self-portrait photography. This deeply personal exhibition explores the rifts this disease can forge between a person, her body, and self-identity, thereby bearing witness to the powerful external and internal transformations that result.

At the end of 2009, Constance Thalken was diagnosed with breast cancer, a disease her mother overcame 46 years prior. From early 2010 through 2011, Thalken underwent a myriad of cancer treatments, including surgery, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy. Through the various hospital visits and procedures, she accumulated an assortment of bandages and identifying bracelets that she saved. During this time, she threw herself into a period of intense research, reading every article she could find about her disease. Throughout her daily routine, she spent increasing amounts of time looking in her bathroom mirror, observing and absorbing the changes taking place.

1.2 cm= is the result of this fraught period, caused by a mere 1.2 centimeter-sized tumor. It's a striking body of work that confronts the unavoidable physical and psychological changes that accompany cancer as seen through the penetrating lenses of both patient and artist. And though the patient and artist are one person, these identities are trapped in a delicate conflict.



Constance Thalken, *Self-Portrait #4*, 2012, lambda chromogenic on dibond, 36×24 inches, Courtesy of the Artist and Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta

The patient removed bandages, hospital bracelets, and other vestiges of treatment; the artist saved them, treating them like artifacts and documenting them on her bathroom floor to create 45 images. The patient pulled her thick auburn hair into a ponytail and lopped it off the night before beginning chemo; the artist lay the lock of hair against the clay-red travertine tile floor, simultaneously imagining the tile's crevices and pockmarks transform into wrinkles and scars. The patient lost control of her body and fought to regain her health; the artist discovered a metaphor for her body in this new environment, and drew strength from this.



Installation image, Constance Thalken's *1.2cm*, White space Gallery, January 11 - February 16, 2013, Courtesy of White space Gallery, Atlanta

When the chemo ended and her hair grew back—a surprising shock of white—the artist confronted the patient. By the light of her bedroom window she sat for her own camera, naked except for a ring on each hand, and saw as if for the first time the changes that transpired. In the resulting self-portraits, she noticed the faint halo caused by her fine white hair, the tensile strength of her hands, and the new mountains and valleys that formed during the tectonic shifts in weight and muscle mass. In *Self-Portrait #1*, she saw that the loss of her hair allowed her eyes to become her strongest feature, and in their gaze she witnessed her own resolute spirit, as well as a hint of playfulness. In *Self-Portrait #2*, she bore witness to the scars of the lumpectomy and, rather than reject her new body as changeling, chose to embrace it.



Constance Thalken, *Self-Portrait #1*, 2012, lambda chromogenic print mounted on dibond, 36×24 inches, Courtesy of the Artist and Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta

In *1.2cm=*, Thalken brings the viewer into the psychological struggles of a person fighting cancer, those of recognizing your body and retaining your identity while your health slips away. Through 45 images of discards, we feel the catharsis of separating each item, documenting it, and letting it go. And through her self-portraits, we, with a gasp, acknowledge the transformative effects of this battle, and embrace life anew.

In case you're wondering, Thalken is now cancer-free and doing just fine.