



**ARTIST**

Christine Osinski

**TITLE**

Swimmer with Book, from the series 'Drawn to Water'

**DATE**

2006

**DIMENSIONS**

16 in H x 16 in W

**MEDIUM**

Inkjet Prints

**IMAGE NOTES**

sheet 22 x 17"

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

2008.066

**CURRENT LOCATION**

2024-4D

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**CHRISTINE OSINSKI**

**BORN**

1948

**BIRTHPLACE**

Chicago, IL

**GENDER**

Female

**CITIZENSHIP**

United States

**CULTURAL HERITAGE**

European-American

**LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP**

Artist-in-Residence, 2008

**LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS**

Contact Sheet 152

**BIOGRAPHY**

Christine Osinski arrived in Syracuse in a car loaded to the brim with beautiful digital papers. She plans to use the majority of her time printing editions, in varying sizes, of images from her series *Drawn to Water*, which focuses on a group of women who have been in the same swimming club on Staten Island for over forty years. The founder of the group, Alice Robinson, is over eighty years old; her grace, agility, and perseverance attest to the strength and beauty of all the swim club members. *Drawn to Water* asks the viewer to reconsider attitudes towards age, appearance, and vitality, especially as these concepts relate to women in American culture.

Osinski's work has been exhibited domestically and internationally at venues such as the Museum of Modern Art, NY; The Alice Austen House Museum, Staten Island, NY; the Dallas Women's Museum, TX; and Jingshan Tushuguan in China. Her images are part of the permanent collections of institutions including the Museum of the City of New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. She is the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship in 2005. Osinski is a Professor of photography at The Cooper Union in New York City.

**ESSAYS**

Christine Osinski's portraits of women swimmers plunge us into a shimmer of light and dark. Body parts in water lose their visual rigidity. Everything that is not in focus appears as if underwater. What is in focus is crystalline. The low light at the Staten Island pool where Osinski has photographed for years forces this shallow depth of field. Eyes open wide as we examine these images that are both piercing and dreamy. Osinski's series *Drawn to Water* asks us to rethink the way we see, demanding we stop gobbling up images at remote control speed, slow down, and pay the subjects of each photograph careful attention. Only by going slow, by sipping these pictures rather than tossing them back, can we really see the tiny details that save us from misunderstanding and impart to us the stories of what is happening within each scene. What at first glance, for example, appear to be wrinkles on one young girl's forehead are actually imprints from a recently removed swim cap, and the marks around her eyes are leftover from a pair of goggles. This young swimmer is not inordinately tired, starving, or suffering from some disease, as someone simply glancing at, rather than studying, this image might assume. If you breeze through these images, you risk confusing Osinski's eye for detail with a predilection for the strange. It is obvious to the vigilant viewer, however, that the photographer is not interested in freakishness even as these portraits pay tribute, given Osinski's sharp-eyed unveiling of her subjects, to Diane Arbus's oeuvre. Osinski is interested in what it means to really see. What makes her work unique is that the women she photographs are equally interested in being seen. Osinski's photographic approach not only allows but also encourages her subjects to embody their sovereign selves. Study how the middle-aged woman gazes out at us, the light cast on the water from an unseen source like feathery wings trailing behind her. Necklaced by the water, she regards the viewer with open-mouthed joy, her floral-patterned swimsuit as bold as her unabashed self-presentation, her eyes her own, even as she opens them to us. Or witness the self-possessed young woman, whose regal profile against the mosaic tile wall bespeaks a timeless grace. These women are at home in their bathing-suited bodies, no matter their age or size, in front of Osinski's lens. Toss out the idea of a one-way gaze that only captures. Osinski's gaze frees. Look, if you get the chance to view the entire series, at the woman stretching her powerful upper body while sitting atop a narrow changing-room bench. She stares out—not at anyone or thing, but past the camera. The lockers stand sentinel behind her. These women are the selves we so often wish we could show, but rarely dare trust others to see. When we think no one is looking: This is the feeling Osinski aims for when she shoots. Osinski's images lack the usual baggage found in most visual reproductions of women's bodies. Most photographs of women emphasize or market a singular idea of beauty. Women pictured in swimsuits usually are seen sexually. Osinski refuses these tropes. Her subjects in swimsuits are seen as intimate equals—a true testament to the respectful nature of her rapport with those she photographs. Unsurprisingly, given Osinski's rare, non-exploitative approach, the swimmers in this series truly bare themselves—not only physically, but emotionally—before the camera. *Drawn to Water* paints a breathtaking vision of women's invested relationships at the same time as it bespeaks a gifted photographer's ability to appreciate those spectacular and sometimes quiet moments when our independence defines us. Spring Ulmer Christine Osinski teaches at Cooper Union in New York City. She participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence Program in September 2008. Spring Ulmer is the author of *Benjamin's Spectacles*, winner of the 2007 Kore Press First Book Award, and *The Age of Virtual Reproduction*, forthcoming from Essay Press.