

**Jill Magid: *Auto Portrait Pending* (2005)**

**Raebervonstenglin, Independent 2013**

*"Make me a diamond when I die. Cut me round and brilliant. Weigh me at one carat. Ensure that I am real."*

Jill Magid's instructions as to what is to become of her remains after her death are deceptively simple. Her language — concise as a cut diamond — is a disarming mixture of legally-binding precision and poetic prophesy that turns metaphor into hard, immutable reality. Addressing an unknown 'Beneficiary', the owner-to-be of Magid's body in her chosen afterlife, it is an invitation of extraordinary audacity.

A self-portrait by another name, *Auto Portrait Pending* is so radical as to completely rewrite the genre. It is a kind of Faustian pact (a recurring motif for the artist, in fact) with Magid bartering for eternal existence in the form of a carefully curated gemstone commodity, and in so doing offering her own body as an artwork in the making. Further than that, it can also be considered a transubstantiation with all the potential heresy that implies, though one that is surprisingly common (Lifegem's services are offered at around a thousand funeral homes in the US and the desire to remain in possession of a loved one as a 'memorial diamond' is lucrative business). With *Auto Portrait Pending* Magid questions the fetishisation to turn of love for someone into a concrete object, whilst submitting herself to this process. Both ironic reflection and committed undertaking, the piece also opens a spiritual enquiry as profound as a person's soul is intangible.

Part of the work's peculiar power lies in its provocative blurring of so many immiscible qualities, beginning with organic and mineral, personal and clinical. Both ready-made and yet-to-be-made, *Auto Portrait Pending* is a conceptual artwork whose realisation is resolutely physical. Its materials are as much the words, promises and permissions of a living breathing body as they are gemstone and precious metal. Currently, at its core is absence, a pregnant void to be filled as much by imagination as by the future diamond. The viewer sees an open black box that beckons like the grave; the traditional accessories to an unconventional proposal; an emblem of finitude and reverberation. "For me, a successful or meaningful work is one that is clear and simple; it offers enough space for its meaning to multiply, to have different layers of meanings", Magid has said. "With *Auto Portrait Pending*, I felt this."

*Auto Portrait Pending* occupies a unique place in Magid's output, yet is representative of her practice as a whole. Her art creates intimacies with systems — including police, secret service, CCTV and forensics — subverting these through seduction and embedding herself within them. Concerned with the relationships between the personal and the social, her work is chameleon-like in its ability to assume different forms: "If my subject is made of clay, I will work in clay"; "if my subject's out of reach I steal it in a mirror", she has explained. In *Auto Portrait Pending* the medium becomes her own body carbonised to form a diamond, yet the subject of the piece — her own self — remains elusive.

*Jill Magid was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1973. She received a Master of Science in Visual Science at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#), Cambridge, and her Bachelor of Fine Arts from [Cornell University](#) in Ithaca, New York. Magid was an artist-in-residence at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in the Netherlands from 2000-2. She has received various rewards, including the Basis Stipendium from Fonds Voor Beeldende Kunsten in the Netherlands in 2006 and a Netherland-American Foundation Fulbright Grant from 2001-2002. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at numerous institutions including: 'Closet Drama', Berkeley Museum of Art, California (2011); 'A Reasonable Man in a Box', Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2010); 'Authority to Remove', Tate Modern, London (2009); 'Article 12', Stroom, The Hague, Netherlands (2008); 'Evidence Locker', Sparwasser, Berlin (2007); 'Thin Blue Lines', The Centre D'Arte Santa Monica, Barcelona (2007); and 'Libration Point', Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (2005). She lives and works in New York where*

*she is adjunct professor at Cooper Union.*