

a polite conversation:

where there is seemingly none, there is always at least one

*Knowledge of anything is available in the maker of the thing.
And what human beings make, above all, is their own history. – Giambattista Vico*

preface

On May 3rd I have a small solo show of my work at a regional art museum in the Inland Empire. Not unlike the David Lynch movie of the same name, it conjures something of a dream – a big one, vast, maybe monumental, conservative in its politics, definitely somewhere far from the shore. I had to write a statement for the museum show, and here is what I wrote:

Allusions of Modesty, new work by Leora Lutz

Allusions of Modesty references the sublime and transcendental apparitions of vast landscapes, drawing toward human significance, and feelings of being a small component within a larger context. The ephemeral, intangible and disappearing qualities of every-day life become captured in her work as a calling toward reminders of humble awareness, as the title suggests. The photos, small sculpture and large wall-hangings leave much of the original material intact which allow for the objects to speak in poetic narratives about the every-day. Repeated gesture, small turns, and slight changes reiterate notions of routine while leaving room for viewers to build personal connections with the reminiscent ideas found in the materials.

Themes throughout Leora Lutz' art practice reference late 1800's/early 1900's philosophy and literature such as Immanuel Kant and Ralph Waldo Emerson, in addition to minimalist abstraction and concrete poetry happening at that same time – Kazimir Malevich and Stephané Mallarmé in particular. Other points of departure are transcribing poetry into sculpture or drawings, creating audio mash-ups and writing about art history. Relishing the hand-made and early punk rock DIY aesthetic, her work builds a visual bridge between what are now becoming traditional ideas in art movements and pushing toward new, contemporary social movements, namely freedom of expression and the active role that art plays in shaping history.

May 3rd is also the day before the last day of my first year of grad school in the Bay Area. I had spent two years in the IE before moving up here for grad school and prior to that I had spent my entire adult life in the eastern and downtown areas of Los Angeles. I left behind someone to move here. Someone I never should have fallen in love with. Pete Shelley of the Buzzcock's in an interview with *pitchfork* explains the song "Ever Fallen in Love":

Most people think it's about falling in love with someone you shouldn't have. But it's about the way in which you deal with that realization and how you try and find some way to change the other person, which is usually a bit doomed anyway. I mean, it's not one interpretation fits all. People put themselves into the work. I just get the ball rolling and get things going. The rest is added by the listeners.

So, in a sense, Shelley is saying that songs are a way to connect with an audience and once the song leaves the performance, the meaning changes depending on the interpretation of the

listener and the life experiences that they bring to it. I just went to go see the Buzzcock's at a small venue in my new neighborhood here. It was such a bonding experience with the audience. People were dancing, moshing, holding on to each other and singing along. The band was so good – not in the least bit “old”. The experience made me feel young again actually, and reiterated the compelling need I have to communicate with others. It gave me hope knowing that there are other people out there who share something in common with each other. There was an attractive man there who mentioned twice that he had recently broken up with his girlfriend and that he had moved because of it. People move, but the memories come and go, and sometimes they stay, leaving an indelible mark. It's something very shared.

*We cannot live only for ourselves.
A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men;
and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes,
and they come back to us as effects. – Herman Melville*

pertain

Several things have gurgled to the surface this past year while in grad school. Especially memories of childhood and love and most certainly about the ways I communicate to others through my art. The burning question that comes to me constantly is that of autobiography. How much of me does the viewer need to see in the work? Or rather, if I share something more personal, a private belief for example, then perhaps this will be a shared view by others who will benefit from experiencing my work. In making things, specific research, ideas or history becomes distilled and erased, leaving shadows of past actions and remainders of human presence. Generosity of interpretation is laid bare for the viewer when I leave the work. But did I leave the work completely?

No one told me when I was 12 that I would be spending the rest of my life trying to figure out what love is and attempting to communicate with people in a cogent way about the art I make. In my propensity for brightly colored, ill-matching separates and necessary 4-eyes, I faced autonomy of a different sort and ran myopically into the arms of Pete Shelley of the punk band the Buzzcock's, circa 1980. On an obscure level, this paved the way for my perpetual intrigue with the ways in which people communicate with each other and how they express themselves.

*It leaves us all wondering
- And it should
This awkward something
- For the good*

*I, I want you
Autonomy
- Buzzcocks*

On a philosophical level, I very much associate with the ideas of Kant's autonomy. Stemming from the ethics of anarchy (as did the punk movement), autonomy is rooted in the notions of the self, the individual, and the desire to work toward a greater, objective good. Kant locates self-legislating dignity by postulating that artistic form is an alternative mode of lawfulness generated by the activity of creative individuals and their practice. To paraphrase Kant: genius is an abstracting force that distills the "purposiveness without purpose". In essence the work instills intentionality imbedded with the artist's personal ideas. Early 1900 art movements, (the first of their kinds) that followed Kantian ideologies are influences for my work.

In a paper I wrote for admissions to the MA program I write about abstraction in great detail, specifically the work of Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé (18 March 1842 – 9 September 1898) and Suprematist painter Kazimir Malevich (February 23, 1879 – May 15, 1935) – two major art-world anarchists for their time. Both artists work in abstraction, negative space, and individual expression and with them I find ethical and creative/making/writing kinship.

Symbolism stemmed from Romanticism. Romanticism dealt with the emotion of the artist, his self-expression, ennui, and awe of humanity. It was a reaction against scientific rationalization of nature in a Post Industrial Revolutionary Age as well as a reaction to the Age of Enlightenment. As reason and rationality became paramount through the influence of Kant and Nietzsche, artists began to revert back to emotion in order to drive their practice. Jean Rimbaud (October, 1854 - November, 1891) regarded Baudelaire as the first "seer" but that his works were "inventions of unknownness [sic] demanding new forms." However observant, it is not Rimbaud who creates poetry in new forms, but rather it was Stéphane Mallarmé.

Mallarmé's sensibility was grounded in an unwavering faith in belief of the letters themselves. According to Mallarmé, "words led back to their origin, the 24 [sic] letters of the alphabet, so gifted with infinity that they finally consecrate language." One of Baudelaire's quotes that Mallarmé lived by was, "There is in the word something sacred which prohibits us from making it a game of chance" – an obvious influence for "Un Coup de Dés Jamais n'Abolira Hasard", which translates as "A Throw of the Dice Never Will Abolish Chance."

[...]

Malevich's squares are restrictive while at the same time liberating. There is nothing particularly unique about a square. It is found in everyday – in construction, at the cross-walk, in geometry. It is the opposite of an organic shape. Organic shapes are defined by natural forms, such as the curve of a face, the rippling of water, the movement of soft clouds, an undulating line on the horizon at the top of the landscape, leaves and so on. Square is man-made, not found in nature, and not natural. In addition, shapes are public domain, meaning that they are already used in the collective conscious, pop culture and in antiquity, so an artist cannot claim identity to a shape as uniquely his or her own invention – therefore it can never be new.

Malevich states in his Manifesto presented at the "0.10: The Last Futurist Exhibition" of 1915:

"The black square on the white field was the first form in which nonobjective feeling came to be expressed. The square = feeling, the white field = the void beyond this feeling. Yet the general public saw in the non-objectivity of the representation the demise of art and failed to grasp the evident fact that feeling had here assumed external form. The Suprematist square and the forms proceeding out of it can be likened to the primitive marks (symbols) of aboriginal man which represented, in their combination, not ornament, but a feeling of rhythm. Suprematism did not bring into being a new world of feeling but, rather, an altogether new and direct form of representation of the world of feeling."

One of my recent works is a transcription of the sheet music for Claude Debussy's (22 August 1862 – 25 March 1918) *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. Debussy was inspired by the Symbolist Mallarmé poem, *The Afternoon of a Faun* (1876).

The piece I made is of a clear acetate sheet that drapes over a simple piece of wood, insinuating a window and reiterating the Symbolist concerns with the invisible. On the acetate I have transcribed the music notation for *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* using pin-pricks. The piece has been well-received despite the fact that I thought I was getting more and more elusive with my work – in actuality I have been getting more concise. And there lies the rub. The crux of almost everything I make. It's not to confuse, but to provide audience ownership – to allow them to view the work in their own way. The Modernism Lab at Yale University states:

"The poem...with those hermetic meanings available only to the poet or the skilled reader and the corresponding belief that poetry must be allusive, opaque, and difficult. In the poem, Mallarmé compresses syntax and incorporates symbols with essentially private meanings, so that two readers of the poem might well disagree about what it meant".

Prelude... is one piece within a series of work I have been doing about music as a way to further explore the ephemeral nature of things that are held close. Another piece called *Polite Conversation* is a video projection accompanied by an audio mash-up I created. The premise for this work began with the concept of famous musicians having a "conversation about love and loss". The work mirrors the intangibility of music, while at the same time imparting the things about it that are most memorable *despite* its portability, and invisibility. *Polite Conversation* features the music for Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* and Debussy's *Prelude to Afternoon of a Faun*. The extracted text used for the projection are excerpts from the lyrics and *Take Five*, and the poem by Mallarmé, *The Afternoon of a Faun*:

*Wouldn't it be better
Not to be so polite
You could offer a light*

*Start a little conversation now
in a solo long, we might amuse
the beauties themselves and our credulous song;*

*I keep looking through till the evening.
opening my mouth
an empty, sonorous line.*

*Not a single word do we say
It's a pantomime and not a play
void of word and my body weighed down*

*When you smile, that's much too discreet
Though I'm going out of my way
I shall see the shadows you became.*

To reiterate the beliefs of the Malevich's Suprematists: Abstractness occurs when it does not apply a given formulation to the world when it is presented to others. In this way it becomes unexplainable in and of itself and leaves itself open for response of the viewer. What

really matters is what is brought into being by human activity in the language we employ in carrying out these activities. Or more specifically, to long for, speak for, wish for, make of – this is passionate, assembled action. This is desire.

[..] People were all about doing what they were doing. ...So we sang about what we knew. It was the idea that the everyday trivial thing is universal, and that's what always got shoved out of communication. The hardest things to talk about, really simple things, are where the richness of life is.

-Pete Shelley

epilogue

In a dream a man came to my window.

In reality a man came down the stairs at 4 o'clock in the morning. This man (I assume it is the same one) arrives between the hours of 1 am and 3 am most Sundays. And then he leaves after about 20 minutes of his arrival. During this arrival and departure interval I can hear the bed upstairs in sequential squeaking. Sometimes I hear her moaning. And then I hear muffled conversation, and the bounding footsteps heading down the stairs and out the gate. Except this time I didn't hear the gate. My imagination went wild in my fitted slumber, fading in and out of lucidity.

Did I not hear the gate? – fade out – do I hear footsteps behind the window at my headboard? Do I hear the soft ground pressing down, and the curious glaring to see in between the Levolors? – fade in – My ears craned: WOAH! My heart stopped. My breathing stopped. And then I faded back to sleep realizing he would not be able to see through my drapes, and that enough time had gone by – he must have left. Still, awakening a few minutes later with a vision of a dark figure...it was not real. Nor was it a fantasy, it wasn't something I wanted, but rather something I feared.

Perhaps this is because I live alone now, and the nightmare was the day after I was prompted for a visit from a past love – with which after a brief conversation discussing said matter of visitation, I felt a gloom in that I did not want to see him. Perhaps not for a very long time, let alone these coming days at the end of the semester. There was a gap, a negation of something real – dreams should be something for the waking hours.

I had a dream the other night. My hair was very long. You were holding a handful of it near my face, and then as you drew back you held the hair in your hand, but moved away from me, still holding the hair, looking into my eyes. And then you took out a beautiful and long pair of scissors and cut the handful of hair close to my chin, and you keeping the rest, backed away as you looked into my eyes and I began to wake up.

Union union/union
dream of total union with the loved being

Naming of the total union: "the sole and simple pleasure" (Aristotle), "the joy without stain and without mixture, the perfection of dreams, the term of all hopes" (Ibn-Hazm), "the divine magnificence" (Novalis); it is undifferentiated and undivided repose...I dream that we delight in each other according to an absolute appropriation; this is fruitful union, love's fruition (with its initial fricative and shifting vowels before the murmuring final syllable, the word increases the delight it speaks of by an oral pleasure; saying it, I enjoy this union in my mouth).

-Roland Barthes

Bibliography

Altieri, Charles. *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*. Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1989

Bök, Christian. "The Higher Dimensions of the Poem (Part 1)". *Poetry Foundation* 21 Apr. 2010.
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2010/04/the-higher-dimensions-of-the-poem-part-1/>

Lewis, Pericles, "The Afternoon of a Faun", *The Modernism Lab at Yale University*, adapted from Pericles Lewis's *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge UP, 2007), pp. 47, 49.

Sisson, Patrick. "Buzzcocks." *Pitchfork* 29 Jan. 2009. Website.
<http://pitchfork.com/features/interviews/7583-buzzcocks/>

toasted.com, online interview with Steve Diggle, 2010 <http://www.toasted.co.uk/playinterview/3331/The-Buzzcocks-video-interview-with-Steve-Diggle2.html>