

Pillow Talk

- Stevie Greco and Natalie Schuh

Over a shared love of Rodney Graham, grilled cheeses, feminist theory, office supplies and blazers, *Pillow Talk* was born. Beginning in Chicago, both working at the same gallery, we established a friendship, which led to super deep conversations about contemporary art. Over the years, as our professional careers developed, as we moved to different cities, the desire to curate a show developed over prolonged g-chats. Shaped by our curiosity of empathy in contemporary art, *Pillow Talk* explores a curatorial interest in the way the human body relates to and has a discourse with an art object or installation.

To be sure, *Pillow Talk* grew from our mutual interests in, among other things, the work of Tracey Emin and *A Lover's Discourse* by Roland Barthes. We were inspired by the harsh honesty proposed by Emin's work, and the way in which that artist asserts her sexuality, femininity, and inward perspective. Naturally Emin's boldness implicates the female self in objects and installations in a way we did not find meaningful. Besides there is little room for secret in Emin's work and we found our greatest enthusiasm in ambiguity. Ultimately, *Pillow Talk* allows space for a personal narrative developed by the dialogue between intimacy and estrangement – by means of the four artists in this show and through our own viewing experiences of the work.

Similarly, while the exhibition investigates the dialogical imprint of sexual interaction, it does not purport a full-on examination of semiotics in romance. Indeed Barthes' manual to solitude and affirmation motivated our own use of language surrounding the show, offering both subject matter and a reminder to favor awareness over sentimentality. There is, of course, a performative element to the works in this exhibition that relates to the expressive form of Barthes' text. Perhaps, and of course, it's Lil Wayne who captures this poetic notion in the best way: "When I'm done she holds me like a conversation/ Weezy baby."

We extended our sincerest gratitude to Edmund Chia and the participating artists for being supportive of our curatorial vision.

- Stevie Greco and Natalie Schuh

Function

By studying the intimacy of objects, musing on the idea that the legs, arms, and back of a chair are reflections of our bodies, Bridgette Buckley uses the malleability of fabric against the structure of wood and metal, exploring the delicate push-and-pull of her materials. Considering the structure of a series of rooms, Gertrude Stein writes, "Suppose they are put together, suppose there is an interruption, supposing that beginning again they are not changed (sic) Is there an exchange, is there a resemblance?" By presenting adaptable forms, Buckley problematizes a similar thought, evaluating the use-value of furniture and calling to question the spatial and visceral boundaries between fine art objects and functional design.

Composed of high-end upholstery fabric and plywood boards, *Negotiating Blanket* resembles a blanket fort, a playful safe house in which to share secrets. The thick, nearly burlap form is malleable, its skin and bones compliant to our comfort. Twill tape peeks out, sturdy fingers reaching from the underbelly. Added and removed at will, pine planks form a hard surface where desired, a simple backrest, or a supple cover for warmth.

Strings Attached, an illuminated fixture inspired by the shape of a bundle stick, explores the tension between suppleness and rigidity. Red parachute strings tenuously hold the piece's components together. Not purely functional, the light acts as a source of spirituality, symbolizing the transience of love and the compromises of intimacy. The piece can be manipulated by its user – transformed by a re-negotiation of the red string and transported to alternate positions. In the work, we recall the shadow of the body, evidence of a human form that once was.

Mischief

Reconstructing everyday objects, Joe Cassan's works are both alien and eerily familiar. Cassan's objects appear straightforward, but there is always something else at play to question your belief in what you understand to be real. His practice stems from the human urge to physically manifest the sublime, drawing influences from art history, religious imagery, iconography architectural space, science fiction, asexual organisms and craft.

A trashy homage to Abstract Expressionism, *Surface Therapy* recalls both the oppressive domesticity of apartment living and a surreal constellation of unconscious alien blobs resembling cilia or microscopic organisms. A scrap piece of cardboard is smothered with an abundance of clay to resemble a fragmented carpet that would exist almost as a back alley scrap or as a model for a larger, more finite project. Clay is violently smudged and smeared into the surface in a sort of ritual of regression, resembling the modern and mass-produced. It is the act of simultaneous doing and undoing, obsession and anxiety that alter the everyday material into the realm of otherness.

The Mollusk, a symbol of primitive being, sits atop a minimalist cube acting as a disruption of the inferred purity of the geometric form. Pitting the biomorphic against the geometric results in an incongruous marriage between the two disparate forms. The octopus being emblematic of the primitive, and the cube as an iconic symbol of order and structure, Cassan presents a struggle at play that exists eternally between humanity and its amalgamation of animal and conceptual form.

Seduction

Danielle Paz's *Is That All There Is?*, a still taken from footage of a video that does not exist in the show, acts as a remnant, something that is or was. The still is taken from a larger project by Paz that re-enacts The Continental Bathhouse in New York City.

In the 1960s The Continental Bathhouse was known for having in-house entertainment and Bette Midler was one of the many performers who got her start there, performing as the Divine Miss M, later dubbed Bathhouse Betty. Midler produced albums by the same name chronicling the songs performed during that time. The song, *Is That All There Is?* is one of the few performances not documented from this period. The song originates from Thomas Mann's existential writing, *Disillusionment*, and harkens back to the talking song of the 1930s. The lyrics recall the witnessing of memorable events as disappointing while earmarking certain stages of life: a tragic fire, a circus, and falling in love.

Paz recreated this performance in a functioning bathhouse in Chicago, IL with a cast of fifteen performers. As documentation of a two-day performance, the video acts as both an archive and long-form music video. The movement in the reenactment was designed to incorporate both choreographed dance as well as perfunctory movement that would trace the specific architecture and usage of the bathhouse. The video considers the notions of desire and expectation in gendered space while specifically drawing on the form and function of the bathhouse in American history.

The voyeuristic character of the film still invites a relationship between visibility and story telling. There is a quest for truth in the representation of these moments; in actuality, we can't be sure, as viewers, we weren't there. These scenes solely exist in time. The only certainty exists within the primary parties, as they were witnesses to the event. A bond evolves between those that observed and participated in the original event and those who are spectators in the project's current state. Something magical happens when a space that the rest of the world may or may not believe exists is visible to simply one person, even for just a short period of time.

Threshold

Driven by fragments of lightness and darkness, silence and noise, discomfoting slowness and tranquil progress, Todd Mattei's *Into the Great Wide Open* situates us at a threshold of reality, a boundary both corporeal and romantic.

In the single-channel video, Mattei creates a dreamy sun-washed sanctuary disjointed by artificial light and an eruption of firecrackers. The meditation and thoughtfulness of the subject studying his own foot in bed – slow, soft, a breeze blowing through the curtains and onto the toes – resonate against the explosive popping as scenes change.

The image of the foot, shot closely - almost stubby - reveals a moment of distinct tenderness. Veins pulse as each toe bends. The foot isolates our attention, a mark made across the monitor. A vestige of a moment in time (or reverie), the foot personifies the vulnerability in tenderness. Sexual pleasure, we're reminded, is temporary, perhaps abrupt. As Roland Barthes notes, however, the sentiment of tenderness is infinite and insatiable. He muses, "Is this gesture not a kind of miraculous crystallization of presence?" Thus in the imagery of lightness we recall our own moments in the other's presence, a nostalgic (com)passion.

Meanwhile, elongated arms and legs of human subjects, friends shooting fireworks in the dark, remind us that tenderness is not an exclusive sentiment, but one shared with and bestowed upon many. Defined by cathartic shouts – a fun summer night keeping the neighbors up – the scenes of darkness lacerate our quiet desire, forming different sets of subject-object connections.

By recalling our own public (social) and private (lonesome) moments, the viewer gives *Into the Great Wide Open* a very personal narrative, one which acts as a threshold to our own realities and to those that are shared. Here, Mattei posits an opportunity for an intimate interaction with scattered consciousness. We enact our own relationships to the piece.