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Garcia, Kim Fumar

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Is Love a Tender Thing?

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Arts

by

Kim Garcia

Thesis Committee:
Professor of Art Jennifer Pastor, Chair
Bren Professor of Art Daniel Martinez
Assistant Professor Amanda Ross-Ho
Professor of Art Antoinette LaFarge

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Is Love a Tender Thing?

By

Kim Garcia

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Jennifer Pastor, Chair

This writing serves as a expository text of the thought-process regarding the work generated for the thesis exhibition *is love a tender thing?*, which was installed in University Art Gallery from April 28th- May 12th, 2018. In this document, fiction as an action is explored as a productive site for imagining resolutions to ‘micro-disconnections’ found in artistic collaboration. Themes of community, sentimentally, interdependency are explored through a lens, which slows down and hones into the overlooked forces of tension and gravity within the misconnections of relationships.

Three years ago, I had a loose question that explored what the common threads between my art practice as an individual artist and a collaborative artist were. I thought that by allowing for a space of rigorous exploration within both practices, I would eventually find the tether, or explanation, to the urgency to work in both ways. My studio practice began by revolving around anthropologic ideas of lines¹ as traces of gesture, and maps for tracking connection and histories. Driven by the potentiality of a line depicting a state of flux, I honed in on thinking about line as a drawing of relationships in a state of conditional meanings. The progression of these studies led me to think towards object oriented ontology², how we navigate and define ourselves within the influences of objects, how objects can act as stabilizers³ within relationships and the ethics of gift-giving⁴.

Simultaneous to my studio practice, I initiated several collaborative projects to work through ideas of place and belonging contemporarily. The projects asked questions about how we can reorient ways of thinking about art display in unactivated spaces, how we make work within the systems we're given to occupy, and how we make work as a group. Within collaboration, the exchanges are the most generative site for production, but I found myself situated in an accumulation of what I call a 'micro-disconnection'; suppressed gestures that are sculpted through a perceived expectation of the other. It is a gesture of connection that misses, and through its accretion, a few of the collaboration fell flat. After a few failed collaborations, their affect became apparent, and their residue began to seep into my studio practice. Personal items began to mutate away from their form, transforming into animated and enlarged objects. I explored fiction as a antidote for collaboration, as a way for the work to perform diversions pointing towards truths. The

¹ See Ingold, anthropological investigations of lines that reimagines the potency of lines, especially chapter 3.

² See Hodder, for an analysis of the topic of human and object relationships.

³ See Ahmed, for her writing about the status of objects as stabilizers in interpersonal relationships.

⁴ See Mauss, in regards to his writings about the ethics of gift-giving.

colors became more vibrant and I amplified my investigations of artifice and material surfaces. Confusing the materials in order to create a suspicion of what is performing and being influenced by another materiality or unseen force. The material confusions, gravity and support became ways of manifesting dependencies in the terms of the world I created.

Last year, I finally began uncover the answer I was searching for, a practice and series that is a movement between the two. A way in which I could enact these social and communal interdependencies within a collaborative practice and through an individual studio practice, be able to process through memory and repetition, all the complexities within those power dynamics, ‘micro-disconnections’, and residual impressions left over from a real experience. The new work produced for the thesis was a device and process for me to inspect why I work in both practices, how they influence each other, and how this can open up my own art practice after graduate school.

IS LOVE A TENDER THING?

The thesis exhibition, *is love a tender thing?* negotiates the boundaries within relationships: the misunderstandings between people through gestures of sincerity, the gravity between bodies through weight and tension amongst the sculptural objects and their influence of navigation through the viewing space. A relationship’s residual impressions often having consequences that are guided by micro-disconnections and are often forgotten and then accumulated. The works present are fueled by images of archived past collaborations. The impetus to enact this gesture was to turn a critical lens to explore what we hope to gain through connecting with others. How within the structures of community, there are always inherent disconnections that are left unsaid. How do we can effectively connect with others without dissolving ourselves? And how could we possibly reorganize to make a space for another way of thinking about connection within community? The sculptural objects and

video works began by staging a ‘re-remembering’⁵ of past collaborative projects between artists and friends who I deeply care for. The ‘re-remembered’ story was derived and directed from isolated vignettes of collaborative works that utilized unactivated architectural spaces, for intuitive group responses to production and display. I constructed a video set that compressed these collaborations into one work, in space that literally replicated the University Art Gallery that the work would, and could be situated in. Here, is where the fictionalizing act⁶ begins, it is in the mediated retelling of the collaborative experiences. The mediation is the fictionalized act, as it occupies the space of what absent, describing an new experience formed through all that it excludes: the original collaborations, myself physically as collaborator, the origin and the original site.



⁵ ‘Re-remembering’ – both literally a reassembly of members and the act of remembering.

⁶ See Iser, for the explication of the gesture of the ‘fictionalizing act’, an action which gives form to the imaginary through the real attributes that are excluded.

The retelling is the vehicle for expressing a subjective truth, where I am consciously aware that this is a projection of the longing for connectivity and a desire to reoccupy a space of belonging. The works in the exhibition are therefore further mediations from the original story; its form deviated further from its origin. Expanding into a new world built on the foundation of what is vacant, to become a new relationship of its own. I don't expect the viewer to extract the original story that catalyzed the production of the work, but my aim is to place the viewer in the space of an active negotiation of forms and images that are woven together and can be guided by the exhibition title: *is love a tender thing?*

A photo lies on the table.

It depicts an image of a figure-like object, harshly lit within a dark space. Within the image, what takes central focus is a colorful bluish blob resting on a metal bar. Where it rests, and what structure it is relying on, are exposed, and its upper half disappears into the left corner of the frame; receding into the darkness from which it emerged.

Kate ends most nights in her studio by taking a flash photograph of her now darkened space. The photographs are always positioned at a low-angled-point-of-view, indicating that she snapped the photo while she was laying in a resting position. The photograph being the last action she does before falling asleep.

Within the collection of photographs, each image captures a very particular moment in time. A moment after a long day's work. A moment right before rest. A moment right before the maker becomes an object among the objects she created. A moment when the objects in her studio transform into creatures that emerge from darkness, almost as if they were lost and double now as discovered artifacts. These images capture the objects in a state of suspension, with its process en route towards its resolutions. Within the archive their impressions track a trajectory of movement and change. What gets carried over? What forms or positions get fixed? Do they still exist or have they already transformed? The experience of this gesture of archiving, allows for perspective within her practice, to identify and meet

her work once again. It is a gesture that allows for remembering, and a gesture that allows for detachment from the making stance. It is a moment that allows Kate to enter a contemplative space that pauses and allows for studying the small influences and dependencies within her practice.



Upon entering the gallery, forms that are the size and weight of bodies activate the space; they are supported and restrained into positions that are relational and interdependent on each other. They are sculptures that are flamboyant in color and are assembled as a form that is made out of a collection of objects. These works enact a real system of support between materials and sculptured forms, but through the influences of other materials they become singular. The works are balanced, their positions are not fixed but placed, and their weight and materiality dictate their stances. Their objectness is in the act of negotiation between their counterparts, appearing as a

paused scene of relations that are invested in the present. Scattered around and in the periphery of the gallery space are video projections and smaller objects that are supports and impressions of the larger sculptures occupying the space.

Resting on familiar forms (a cart, a sawhorse), these objects are references to a future and at the same time a past. *Lost Objects* are forms made to resemble a mold and a trace, they are sculptures that oscillate between past and future, support and origin, and are a further iteration of the fictionalizing process. Made from unfired clay and impressed vignettes of the larger counterparts, they are support systems ready to be activated. Although already inherent in their materiality is a timeframe that can only undergo a certain amount of weight before crumbling.

The video set reemerges in the exhibition as a fragmented series of 6 looped video projections. Skewed and pulled towards a dimension within the wall space in the University Art Gallery's architecture. A fusion of the imagery of performed art making gestures with a hyper-colored lens, the videos depict actions in continuous motion always within the sightlines of the sculptures. The scene transforms in 3 of the videos to a still image in a naturalized color. They depict a space reminiscent of the gallery, weaving the location of the exhibition back into the video. The actions signal to repetitive making, something that is always in process. The loop being an important tempo to the exhibition that activates the space through an extended gesture that has no beginning and no end. The scenes are the site of production. In this way, *A space that won't hold its shape* is representative of the past, but is something carried through as residual momentum.

MICRO-DISCONNECTIONS

In the investigation of understanding relationships, my attempt to discover underlying problems were focused on the slight gestures and feelings that are often under-expressed and which hover in a space of double meaning. Built through the postures of accommodation, these

expressions are subjugated, creating an exteriorized gesture that is muted and gravitating away from connection. These slight gestures are what I call ‘micro-disconnections’, small movements that are formed through careful considerations of affection, that allow for a space for another to occupy.

What are you willing to relinquish of yourself in order to create a space for another?

These micro-disconnections are often exchanges that happen casually and are never in the intent to do harm. In fact, these exchanges are the most opposite of that, and are formed through an attempted telepathy; a gesture that attempts to leave space for the possibility of the other. By doing so, it creates a hole, a new space within a space that has a capacity for another force to enter and occupy. The flaws in this utopic gesture are that it attempts to convey its feelings through non-verbal and indirect actions; it assumes knowledge of the future based on observed histories of the other. The gestures are internally subjugated and externally misread. The danger of micro-disconnections is in their scale; often left unresolved, carried through, and then accumulated to become a larger intended disconnect.

Katie makes work about relationships, often as a way of creating a system of call and response to how she negotiates her boundaries and place within a system of micro-disconnections. She turns her inspection to the interpersonal negotiations of occupation and investment through its slippages of closeness and its boundaries of proximity. Hoping to explore what it means to democratize relationships and labor through careful considerations of others.

Vilém Flusser, a philosopher who is known for his explorations of communication and artistic production, writes about the gesture of loving⁷. He states in his text, that the gesture of loving is a complicated gesture, it is always misread by its enacted exteriorization: if it is described verbally then it sounds magical and if it is enacted physically then it becomes sexual. He ends the

⁷ See Flusser, for his investigations of making gestures.

text by stating that, “It is individually and socially tragic. For the gesture of loving is the way we can lose ourselves in another and so conquer our alienation” (54).⁸ I find that losing individuality is a complicated thing to do and I am not convinced that loving is when two or more things merge into one. In the gestures that are formed through loving, what seems like a more endearing potential, and the most delicate, is the negotiation between those participating within the relationship. How can they inform each other, how can they grow, how can they stay in movement as a dialogue between bodies? Within this endearing potential, there are complications, misinterpretations, perhaps forms of censorship in the intention to do no harm. An action extended as a psychic gesture hoping to predict what can be prevented in order to maintain harmony. My interests are in a practice of slowing down these complications in order to work on the most small and most immediate departures from a synchronized relationship.

8 spools of 1,000 feet of paracord

Military approved specifications

2 spools of acid purple

2 spools of force

2 spools of zombie

And 2 spools of acid barney goes bright goth

Katie moves her hands a choreography that applies force

While watching X-files she repeats the gesture for 10 hours

Mulder is searching for the truth

These lines remember...

⁸ See Flusser, text from his chapter, “The Gestures of Loving” (54).

CAN FICTION BE A SITE OF PRODUCTION?

The retelling of a past experience mimics a sculptural casting process. Where through the *mold* (the retelling) is already is a new second thing; it is a framework that is constituted by the cavity left by the original thing being absent. This absence of the indexical experience gets filled with a fluid material that serves as a carrier for a third thing, a *cast*, containing subjectivity, repetition and reflection. As more *casts* are formed through that same *mold*, more information gets lost through its process. Formed by all that is repressed from the initial exchange, the *casts* rendered are condensed impressions and fragments of unknown pasts that are interdependent on the world they've created.

Elizabeth Grosz, a theoretician who explores materialism, embodiment, and sexual difference writes about the mixture process of total blending⁹, where every element of the other body or material is blended. But contrary to the name, each body can be extracted from the blend, and a third entity is formed, which is neither of the two bodies that created it. Through the fictionalizing act, the body of work produced in the thesis are attempts at the reconciliation of a disconnect. Rooted in the negotiations between bodies, the hope is to produce something that is a causation of the blending process, that third entity: an active space that reimagines connection through interpersonal and material dependencies.

A gurgling site of production that is in a constant re-negotiation of its perimeter. Katie aggregates the space around her to dislodge, dismantle, and manipulate what encloses her. Shifting in and out of consciousness her boundaries are a construction of personal objects, memories, and exchanges, which repeat and expand outwards from its origin.

⁹ See Grosz, for the topic of material and incorporeal blending, especially chapter 1.

As a work begins, it is always in an embodied attempt to re-inhabit an experience. Taken from a real exchange, this exchange can entail a multiplicity of things: a conversation, a friendship, a memory, an observation, a fight, etc. Something that I can experience and respond to, something other than myself. A conflict that ignites a mental and material conversation that puts into practice a slowing down and breaking apart of the topic of interest. Dissolving the topic into individual materials that can be rebuilt and reworked, in order to open up a range of possibilities of connection and it is an attempt to turn a critical lens to its prior constitution.

I use fiction as a site of production that operates in a parallel relationship to the conflict. It allows *the imaginary* to be formed and directed by *the real* and is a chance to reorganize and reimagine the components and characters that are involved in the ‘micro-disconnections’. The site of production is always active; its constructed forms are never fixed. The gestures are always extended either through repetition or stillness, and there is no end because there is no definite solution. The sentiment of my practice is in the aim to give power to what is absent, what isn’t visible, what may be powerless, and what cannot easily be concluded or defined. The fiction allows of a certain liberty that the work is not absorbed in a clear succinct way, but through an oversaturation of gravity and vacancy that can be felt through a bodily navigation of the work. Through a viewer’s presence they are implemented in the work’s process of negotiation between the site of fiction and its discourse with the real.

A line is moving at various speeds.

It wobbles to its left, and then to its right.

It slows down for a full 5 seconds before it ramps up to an incline.

It then proceeds to its next destination.

The line is formed through its connections.

Its fluctuating speeds are dependent on the status between its connected relationships, all through which form and un-form its constitution. The line is a trace and a relationship to a body and material. The residues of the unresolved and the engrained have an influence on the direction and shape the line as it procedures forward. Its meaning is contingent on the slippages and the negotiations of what it is and not connect to.

As it continues along its path with high hopes for its the next connection. A next transition that can complicate is configuration: a force, a new potential. The line thrives in a liminal motion, a speed that is not fixed, but is constantly re-negotiating all that it remembers.

EXHIBITION IMAGES







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