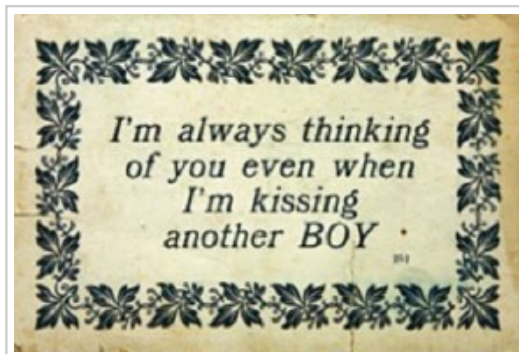


ART QUIPS

Writing Outside the Mainstream

3.26.2010

Ethan Shoshan: I'm always thinking of you even when I'm kissing Another boy | Aljira A Center for Contemporary Art



by Jill Conner

In English the reflexive verb is used most often in technical writing or personal memoirs, but it rarely appears noticeable when spoken. This particular verb refers the direct object, the self, back to the subject of the sentence or idea. Indo-European languages make use of reflexive verbs more frequently and often without regard to any specific grammatical rules of the language. In other words the articulation of the subject and itself portrays a relation that one has in contrast to others while maintaining a close connection through the stated difference.

The reflexive is complex. It is primarily reciprocal and transitive but can also appear with intransitive verbs. Ethan Shoshan's exhibition at the Aljira Center for Contemporary Art in Newark titled *I'm always thinking of you even when I'm kissing another boy* stands as a personal statement of free associations that are embodied through a series of objects which have been collected by the artist over time. Initially given as gifts, these items have become part of a larger narrative that rings universal, conveying the multi-layered, shifting characteristics of memory and meaning.

Experiencing art outside of a market context is suddenly unique but also quite liberating. Shoshan arranges these gifted objects in a personal order:

while numbered on a complimentary diagram, this arrangement does not appear sequentially. But in the end, that is not the point. Feelings, thoughts and memories never adhere to a specific order. Instead it is the personal experience that the artist features with each object.

Two small sea shells, for instance, are displayed on a flat, white surface and appear far smaller in real life when compared to the photographed copy that appears in the catalogue. These small shells were kept to preserve the loving memory of a friendship just like the small plastic bag of hair that the artist once shaved from another lover's chest. Shoshan's additional incorporation of a first-person narrative immediately allows the reader to identify with the "I", the self that is presented. And yet, the self is so often masked away as we proceed through the anonymity of life. Postcards, cards and other ephemera represent a series of experiences that symbolize feelings of passion, love, loss, death, sadness and betrayal - events that are critical in shaping one's individual character.

Is Ethan Shoshan's installation any different than the objects made by artists such as Elizabeth Peyton or Urs Fischer? Both Peyton and Fischer re-appropriate the found object as well as the found image, but in doing so, the object's re-representation becomes depersonalized and far removed from anything specific, except its mode of production: a copy of a copy. The elements of Shoshan's collection, by contrast, are either strictly handmade or found, but not reproduced, preserving the individual imprint of the gift-giver while serving as symbols of particular moments.

When describing this installation, Shoshan refers to these objects as archetypes: the symbolic elements whose meanings we all share. Art, therefore, is about how we connect to an object, as well as others, which signifies a mode of perception that is far different from the recent economic boom in contemporary art. No longer is the idea of value displaced into the dollar. *I'm always thinking of you even when I'm kissing another boy* divests the art object from its star status but features it within a scope of a larger idea, none of which is for sale. This exhibition marks a beginning. As this idea continues to travel on to different venues, Ethan Shoshan will be collaborating with more artists, who will contribute objects from their own personal narratives as well.

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