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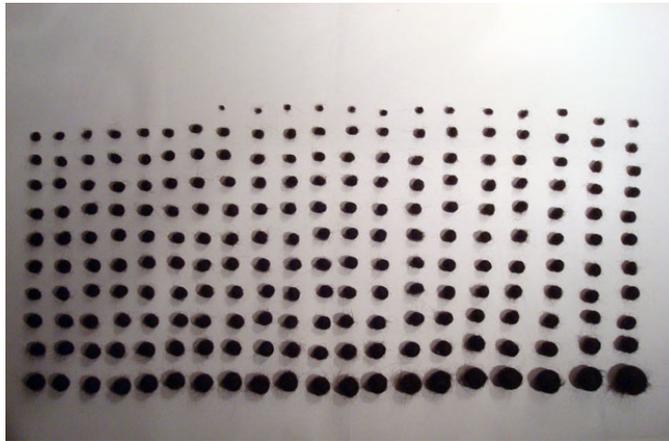
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THE VISUAL AIDS BLOG

WEDNESDAY JUNE 19, 2013

Give Me Just A Little More Time (And Our Love Will Surely Grow)

by Ted Kerr

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Ethan Shoshan, Give Me Just A Little More Time, 2013, human hair variations

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On Saturday June 15th, Visual AIDS hosted a panel discussion entitled BUT DOES IT MATTER with artists Charles Long, Nancy Brooks Brody, Pato Hebert, moderated by Todd Lester. Asserting that Art does matter in the ongoing AIDS crisis, the panel took the opportunity to consider the limits and possibilities of art, focusing much time on self care and memorial. In the audience was artist Ethan Shoshan who began thinking about his own work, and the connections it has to self care and the work of artists Joy Episalla and Geoff Hendricks.

I've been hiding my hair behind an orange hunter's cap, or toque, as Canadians would call it, for over two years now. It's a strange sensation to hide the weight of something that is so much part of history, growth & ourselves. Over that same length of time I have also been grooming my hair —collecting, shaping, placing the fallen or 'pulled' follicles into tiny balls. In this process, I am reminded of my own mortality, my own temporary placement in the world, and what we choose to hold onto like an idea or image of ourselves or others through transitions of aging and loss (physical, mental, or emotional).

This weekend at the Visual AIDS panel, BUT DOES IT MATTER?, I had a chance to think about my hair practice and put it into context after artist Charles Long, one of the panelists, brought up self care. He spoke about it in relation to his activism and art, and how they relate, effecting one another through physical and emotional crises. Long's comments crystalized something in my own experiences: creating rituals around the personal, how we live in the world, and we often don't establish or pay attention to our

EVENT CALENDAR

MAR 7 David Wojnarowicz & Robert Blanchon exhibition

Grazer Kunstverein

MAR 7 We Are Here: Young Activists Talk HIV/AIDS

Bureau of General Services Queer Division

MAR 13 My Body! My Rights!: An Intergenerational Community Arts Werrrqshop with Women Living with HIV

Joan Mitchell Foundation Education & Research Center

MAR 18 How to Change the World

Hammer Museum

MAR 19 The Bronx is Voguing: 1040 Lounge

The Bronx Museum

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bodies, which I often compound into how we neglect our spirits.

This idea was driven home by a question posed to the panel from an audience member, "if artwork is so personal, how can it exist, or be important outside of the people that have a relationship to it?" I took this question to mean: if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, will it make impact (a sound)?

For me the answer is deep in the nature of our existence. All connections make impact, physical or not. It's what keeps us going. The image pictured is an organized collection of my hair balls. I have put the picture alongside images of Geoffrey Hendricks' *Body/Hair* (1971) performance and Joy Episalla's *1992-1998-Present* hair sculpture. After *BUT DOES IT MATTER?*, I thought about my hair balls, Hendricks' performance, Episalla's sculpture, and how by opening up something deeply personal to a public, we can hope to engage and connect aspects of our lives that are more about caring for one another. Hendricks shaved his entire body in this work, symbolizing rebirth and the shedding of pretense, reflecting on the transition of his newly open gay identity in the 1970's post Stonewall. Episalla's *Motion 9* photograph and an on-going sculpture, *Winter 1992 – January 1998 – Present*, shows the accumulation of loss over years and a performative gesture to catch and present an experience through time. She writes, "In the early '90s I had lost many friends to AIDS, and within this experience of loss I found myself holding on to my hair— I started to collect my hair as it came out as I brushed it. I have been crocheting the hair into a sculpture which has grown taller and taller over the years."

A history of our body is written throughout time, and personal rituals can manifest a creative action, or attention to the ways in which we breathe in these changes, meditations, and physical shifts. It's a reminder of the power in our bodies, our mortality, and our understanding of impact.

In thinking about the panel and the question from the audience, I know art can sometimes lose its power to transcend or connect with others but very often the motives dissolve with ego there is a place we can all share, connect, and enact in the context of our own lives that can be enriching..

Ethan Shoshan is a social ecologist, who also engages in aesthetic philosophical visual inquiries, highlighting the importance of everyday gestures.

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